

# SIGHT & SOUND

SUMMER 1938 VOL 7 NO 26 PRICE SIXPENCE



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## ARTICLES

Detective Stories for the Screen

Critic or Reporter?

I Filmed in Madrid

North Sea

A Clay Bluebeard

Shakespeare and the Film

Farthingales and Facts

Ships and Sealing Wax

Daylight Projection

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# THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

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WITHIN THIRTY YEARS the cinema has become one of the great industries of the world. Its influence for good or ill cannot be overestimated. In Great Britain alone the average weekly attendance at the cinema is about 20,000,000 and box office receipts are well over £800,000 a week. At the same time the teaching world has realised the value of the film as a teaching instrument and every month more Local Education Authorities or schools are acquiring and using projectors and films.

So vast and so powerful an industry needs all the guidance that it can receive from thoughtful members of the community. Realisation of this fact has led to the formation of the British Film Institute. To provide a solid foundation for its work the Privy Council has year by year given it a grant from the Sunday Cinema Fund.

In general, the Institute exists to encourage the use of the cinema as a means of entertainment and instruction. In particular it acts as a clearing house for information on all matters affecting films at home and abroad, with special reference to education and general culture. It provides advice and assistance in the use of films and choice of apparatus and promotes research into the various uses of the film.

In the four years of its life, the Institute has become an unparalleled centre of information. Use is constantly made of its services not only by members of the general public but also by government departments, education authorities, schools, film societies and the film trade. It makes known the information in its possession, in a general way, through this quarterly magazine SIGHT AND SOUND, occasional leaflets and pamphlets, as for instance on Non-Theatrical Cinema Apparatus and Films, and subject lists of teaching films. In the MONTHLY FILM BULLETIN are reviewed fictional and non-fictional films of all types and an effort is made to assess their value either in educational terms or by their suitability for different types of audience.

Through its expert Committees there is being built up a body of knowledge on the use of the film for many different purposes. In the main the emphasis of this work has been educational since this was the field in which there was most to be done; the Institute has also concerned itself with entertainment Films for Children, and with Colonial and Dominion problems. Full details of the Institute's activities are contained in its Annual Report a copy of which will be gladly sent on request.

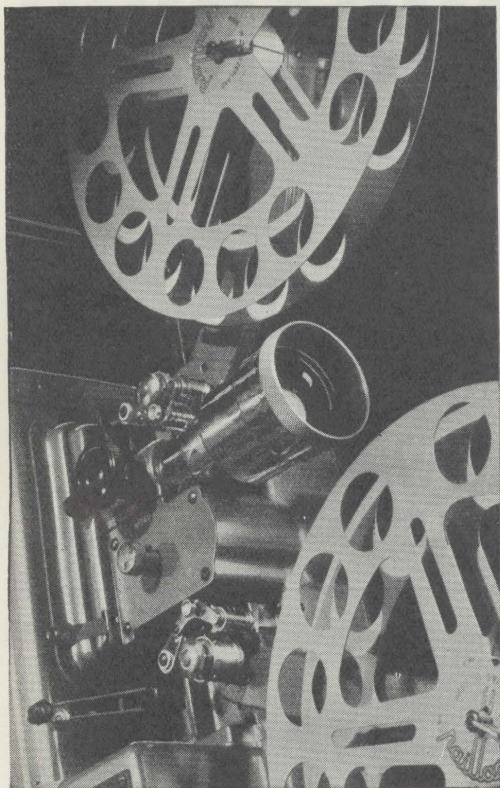
Last but not least of the Institute's activities is its National Film Library through which some 400 films have been rescued from the scrap heap or dug out of old lumber rooms and are now preserved for posterity. (Copies of some of the more interesting are available on loan to Full Members of the Institute). The collection also contains copies of many modern films so that in years to come it will be possible for the student to see the stages in the development of the film and its technique, as well as the social manners and customs of to-day.

Though the major portion of the Institute's finances is the Privy Council grant, it is most important that it should have the material support of all bodies and individuals that have at heart the encouragement of the best type of film and the full development of the cinema. Obviously the best guarantee that its work shall be adequately performed is a strong membership and effective organisation throughout the country to co-ordinate local activities in the same manner as does the parent body in London. Film Institute groups already exist in most chief centres.

The Institute being a company limited by guarantee, it is necessary for intending members to fill up the form of application (enclosed in this copy) and send it to the Institute's office together with their subscription. A copy of the Memorandum and Articles of Association will be forwarded if desired.

Further information can be obtained on application to The British Film Institute, 4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.





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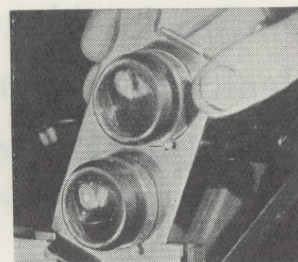


Illustration shows simple action of changing condensers

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M. Boulestin gives instructions on basic principles of cooking. 15 minutes.

### 'PARTY DISH'

M. Boulestin again, making something more elaborate. 15 minutes.

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How the big hotels and restaurants manage in the rush hour. 16 minutes.



If you wish to make up a programme of these and other films of travel and cartoon, write to Mr. Thomas Baird, Film Officer of the British Commercial Gas Association, Gas Industry House, 1 Grosvenor Place, S.W.1.



PUBLISHED BY THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE 4 GREAT RUSSELL STREET LONDON WC1

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## TO READERS

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## CONTENTS

# AVELING GINEVER

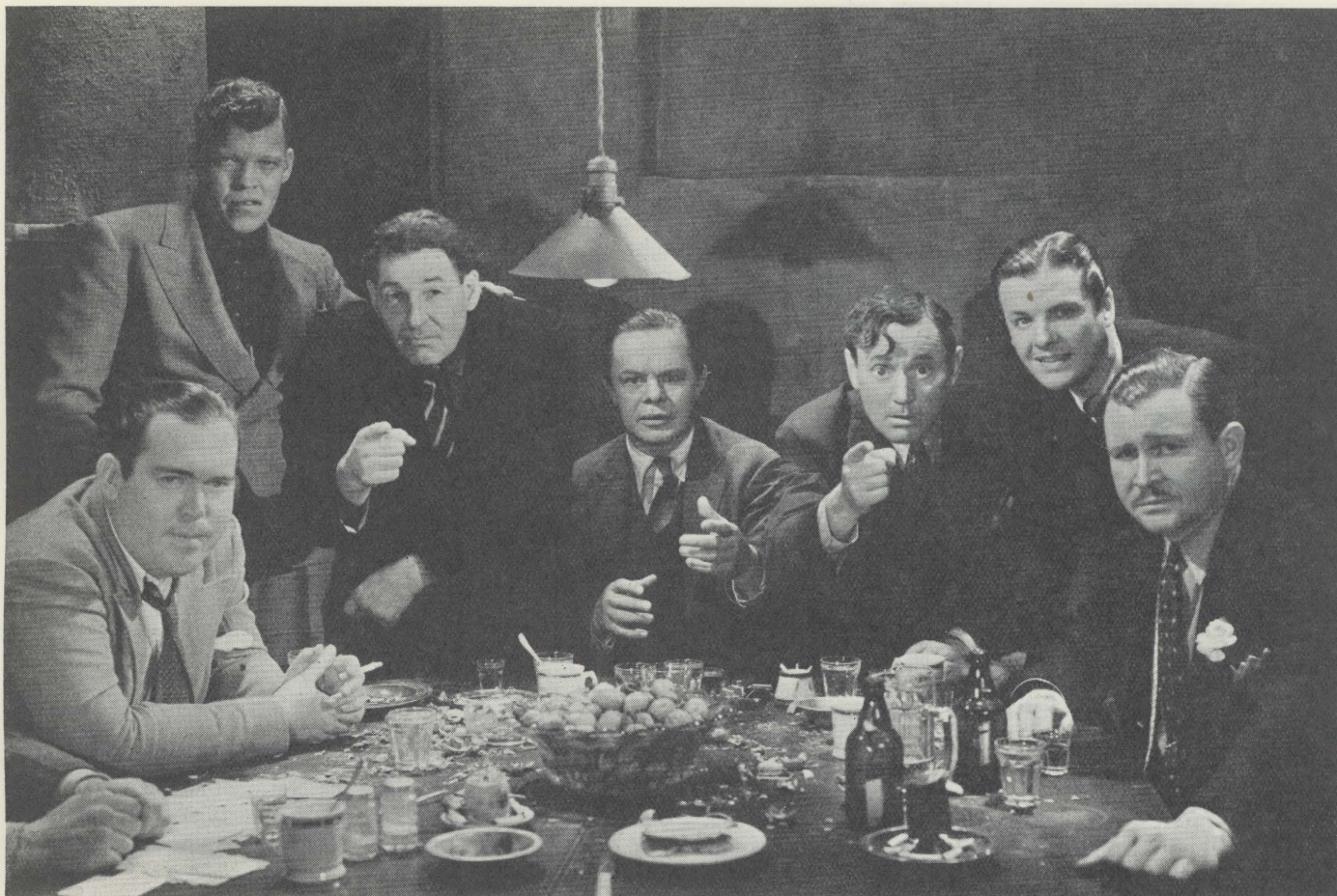
The services of this well-known writer and director are available to producers of Religious, Social Service, Documentary and Educational Films. Mr. Ginever's credits include "This Progress", "Men and Machines", "In Our Time", "Twenty-five Years a King", "Mastership", "Triumph". In production: "Cross Beams"—religious film.

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## TO READERS





*You and Me*

*Paramount*

## THE QUARTER

### INTRODUCTION

"And what," said someone who came into our room the other day, "are you going to write about this time in your Notes of the Quarter? The Films Council, I suppose, and the problem of seat prices, the controversy over non-flam. and things like that?"

"We are not," we replied, firmly. "Enough has already been said about those subjects both in the trade press and elsewhere. A quarterly is meant to be read leisurely and at ease, possibly even in a deck chair at the seaside, and there is no call for us to throw our pebbles into a pond which is already more than sufficiently disturbed. You will find a quantity of serious and well thought out contributions in this number and also—for even the best dishes need some spice—a certain amount of lighter stuff. You will find pictures and information about the film from all over the world, facts about the cinema in education, technical notes. The attitude of the British Film Institute towards the more pressing and serious problems of the day is already—or ought to be—well known, and we do not need to stress it here. In addition this is Summer and most people are on holiday, so——"

"Yes?"

"So we intend to deal in these Notes with a certain exhibition in Scotland, Charlie Chaplin in moustaches and things like that."

### THE EMPIRE EXHIBITION

The Empire Exhibition has given a remarkable fillip to the documentary film in Scotland. Probably the finest collection of documentary films in the world is in the possession of the Exhibition authorities and the three major cinemas of the Exhibition—the Empire News Theatre, the Beardmore-Colville Pavilion Cinema and the Scottish North Pavilion Cinemas are being extremely well patronised. If one includes the numerous smaller cinemas in the Exhibition, it is estimated that 20,000 people each week are seeing documentary films at Bellahouston Park. The Scottish North Pavilion Cinema, where the programmes are organised by the Scottish Film Council, has a collection of almost 200 films dealing with the social services. The fact that many of these films have been produced specially for the Exhibition by Scottish local authorities and other organisations is significant of the interest that these bodies are now taking in the film as a medium of education and propaganda.





#### CHARLIE IN MOUSTACHES

In the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND attention was drawn to the fact that no fragment could be found of ten out of the thirty-five films which Chaplin made for the Keystone Company.

Since that date the National Film Library has succeeded in tracing and acquiring for preservation three of these missing films, *Making a Living*, *Twenty Minutes of Love*, *Gentlemen of Nerve*.

Particular interest attaches to *Making a Living* as this was the first film in which Chaplin appeared, and his drooping moustache and smart frock coat catch the *Encyclopædia Britannica* tripping, since it states in a biography of Mr. Chaplin that "he adopted his well-known get-up from the very first."

The get-up in *Making a Living* is probably the one which he had used in the part which he had just left—the drunken swell in Fred Karno's music-hall sketch. He plays the part of an unscrupulous newspaper reporter.

*Twenty Minutes of Love* is a somewhat commonplace knock-about staged in the usual Keystone Park.

*Gentlemen of Nerve* is interesting as being the last film which Chaplin made for the Keystone Company. Its cast comprises Mabel Norman, Mack Sennett and Chester Conklin and its subject is motor racing, which at that time, along with boxing, was a spectacle for which Chaplin displayed great enthusiasm in his leisure moments.

#### AN INTERESTING EXHIBITION

One of the most novel and interesting sections of an exhibition of three centuries of American art organised by the New York Museum of Modern Art at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, from the end of May to the end of July, dealt with the history of the American cinema.

The outstanding item in the section was the daily showing of a programme of excerpts from American films divided into three parts, the first covering the period from the invention of films to *The Birth of a Nation*, the second dealing with the progress and close of the silent era, and the third with the sound film. An exhibition of stills and of a collection of material to show the various stages in the production of a film from the original script to the preview was also on show.

#### MANCHESTER MOVES

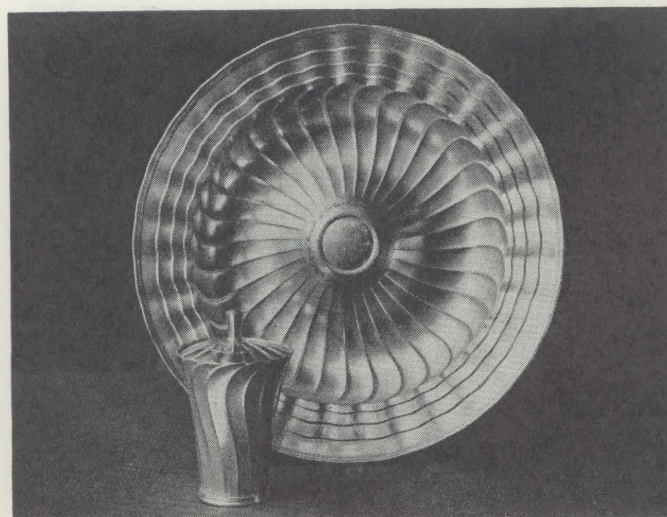
An interesting development of the Manchester Film Institute Society's work has been the foundation of the School's Film Group. An inaugural meeting to discuss "The child, and entertainment in the cinema" was held at the beginning of the season, and as a result groups for the study of film appreciation under the leadership of a member of the staff were set up in a number of secondary and central schools. A joint meeting of individual groups made a critical and appreciative audience for Mr. John Midgeley of the *Manchester Guardian* when he spoke to them on March 18th on "What makes a good film," and later witnessed a second showing of the *Plow that Broke the Plains*. The Group has its own monthly bulletin, specially planned to suit its needs, and a special exhibition of stills of historical, sociological and artistic interest has been connected and mounted by staff and scholars, and is now being sent out on loan in strict rotation to member schools. It is proposed to hold a School of Film Appreciation for group leaders to be conducted by Cyril Ray, late of the Tatler Theatre, Manchester, in the first week of October.

#### REQUEST

Quite a few of our newer readers are anxious to buy copies of early numbers of SIGHT AND SOUND which are now out of print. In particular this applies to Vol. 2, No. 7, which is badly wanted by the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education of New York. If any of you have odd copies of the first eight issues to dispose of we should be glad to hear of them.

#### SILVER FILM

The illustration below is of a silver plate recently presented to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. One of the finest examples of present day chasing and handicraftsmanship, the dish appears in an interesting film on the making of modern silver which was shown throughout the Exhibition of Modern Silverwork held at the Goldsmiths' Hall from July 4th to 23rd. In the film the plate is seen filled with pitch and being chased from the back by the craftsman.







You and Me

Paramount

## DETECTIVE STORIES FOR THE SCREEN

*In this provocative article DOROTHY L. SAYERS—no need to introduce her as one of the best-known living writers of detective novels—gives some advice to producers of this type of film*

### THE TROUBLE about detective stories—

*(By the way, when I say “detective” stories, I do not mean mystery thrillers, the solution of which cannot be guessed beforehand and is, indeed, often left imperfectly explained at the end; nor yet crime stories such as “Ten-Minute Alibi,” in which the audience is told how, why and by whom the crime was committed before the detective is brought on the scene at all. I mean real detective stories, in which detective and audience start off fair and square to work on the same set of clues, the fun being to see which of them is the first to arrive at the one and only complete and logical solution.)*

The trouble, then, about detective stories for the screen is that their construction is a highly-specialised job. It needs considerable experience to get the plot water-tight, the clues all neatly laid in the right order, the red-herrings cunningly trailed so as to mislead without unfairness, and the solution rapidly and clearly presented, leaving no loose ends.

### THE PERSON BEST EQUIPPED . . .

The person best equipped to cope with these problems is, obviously, the established writer of detective novels.

He has his detective technique at his fingers' ends, and while the novice is still wondering what clues to invent, will have all his incidents selected and sorted with the juggling dexterity of a bridge-player arranging a hand of cards.

The expert scenario-writer, on the other hand, has a specialised technique of his own. He knows, better than the novelist, how to present a story in picture-form so as to get it across to the cinema audience. Some sort of compromise or co-operation is therefore necessary. Either the scenario-writer must learn detective technique, or the detective novelist must learn screen technique, if a detective story is to be made satisfactory on the screen.

### . . . IS NOT THE SCENARIO-WRITER

It is not very easy for the average scenario-writer to learn to do the detective work. It is not a job that can be done in a hurry. Even if one has the right mental equipment (a compound of dramatic instinct, ingenuity, guile and a passion for jig-saw puzzles) one needs a good deal of detailed scientific and general information, which cannot be picked up in a day. Access to good libraries and knowledge of how to use them; access to personal sources of



professional information (medical, legal and police) and knowledge of how to extract it by means of the right questions; above all, the trained mind which selects, rejects and combines by a logical process so accustomed as to be almost instinctive—all these things are the fruit of long habit.

It is easier, on the whole, for the novelist to learn the technique of the screen, but he is not easily persuaded to do so, and that for very good reasons. First, it is as troublesome and takes just as long to prepare a film as to write a novel, and the payment offered is not as a rule adequate. Secondly, film managements have no faith in his ability to do his own job and are reluctant to give him the final control over the continuity and dialogue. This means that, if he is an artist at all, he loses interest, knowing that the finished product may bear very little relation to his idea as originally conceived and may, indeed, turn out so full of technical errors as to be positively damaging to his reputation. Finally, he knows that even under the most favourable conditions, he will get no added prestige from writing for the screen, since nobody yet has ever achieved fame as a film-writer—not even Walt Disney, who is chiefly renowned as a draughtsman.

The line of least resistance, and the one usually taken, is to buy the film-rights of a well-known detective novel and screen that. The effect is usually disastrous, just because the author is excluded from active participation in the work. In adapting the story to the screen, the scenario-writer (inexpert in detective work) is apt to leave great gaps in the logical structure, through which the detective interest runs away like water through a sieve. But apart from this, these adaptations are wholly vicious in principle. A story for the screen should be thought out in terms of the screen from the very beginning, if it is to have any value as a work of art. In particular, the solution of a detective novel is commonly conceived in terms of argument. This is quite wrong for the screen. It needs to be thought out in terms of visual presentation. If it cannot be so thought out, then the story is not a suitable screen story at all. In fact, the first requirement, in thinking out a detective story for the screen or stage, is a plot whose solution can be clearly, immediately and completely presented *to the eye*; and that is the point to which everything else in the story should be made to work.

The right way, then, I think, is to get your author and offer him sufficient inducement to learn the job of writing direct for the screen. Some authors obviously have not the root of the matter in them and could never learn. Avoid them. You will know the right kind of author by these signs: in his books, he is able to make you see the physical aspect of his characters and backgrounds without long verbal descriptions; the action of his narrative falls naturally into self-contained scenes, each with its own dramatic development; he tends to tell his story in rapid and well-characterised dialogue, rather than by third-person narration; when you have finished reading his

books, you remember his characters as *people*, quite apart from the plot. If he is this kind of author, he will need very little teaching to tell his story direct to eye and ear rather than through the medium of print. When once you have got him interested, you may trust him to do his work intelligently. If, in his experience, he makes mistakes in screen technique, do not try to put them right in a wrangling committee; show him where the difficulty is and make him do the alterations himself.

Nearly all good craftsmen can be interested in a new technique, and the technique of the screen is nearer to that of the novel than stage technique is to either. Like the novel, the screen can move the action quickly over large extents of time and space, and flash back in a moment to pick up and emphasise a point previously made. It can do things for the detective writer that neither stage nor novel can do; to take a simple instance: if there is a table to be shown supporting ten objects, of which one is a vital clue and the rest red herrings, it can display those ten objects all at once, in a close-up visible to the most short-sighted person in the back row of the gallery, without comment, without tedious description, and without laying undue stress on the particular object which it is the duty of the detective and the intelligent audience to single out for notice. It is the author's business to make full use of such advantages as these. The right way with any new medium is to say, *not* "how can I get over the difficulties of this new medium?" *but* "what can I get from this medium that no other medium will give me?" The right kind of author will pounce with delight on new opportunities and construct his story to fit them; but the wrong kind of author and the wrong kind of story will *never* be right for the screen no matter how great their reputations in their original medium.

I suggest, therefore, that unless and until it becomes possible for a writer to achieve a reputation by writing solely for the screen, the best procedure will be as follows: (1) select a novelist of the right kind; (2) offer him a proper financial inducement to write direct for the screen (this means a sufficient sum down in advance of a royalty on gross receipts); (3) explain to him roughly how films are made and let him get on with his plot, treatment and dialogue; (4) when these are satisfactory, get him down on to the set and, if anything turns out to be not quite right, make *him* alter it in full knowledge of the conditions; (5) alter nothing without his consent, and, if he says that your bright new idea makes hay of the plot, take his word for it, because you must trust him to know his own job.

You may say that this arrangement gives too much control to the author. But in every other medium in the world—music, painting, architecture, engineering, what you will—it is taken for granted that the original creator should have the last word on the final form of the product. If the film enjoys but an evil artistic reputation, it is because in this matter it has chosen to flout the experience of all the centuries.



## FARTHINGALES AND FACTS

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*In this exclusive article JEAN RENOIR, famous French producer of "La Grande Illusion" and "La Marseillaise", talks to you about history and the film*

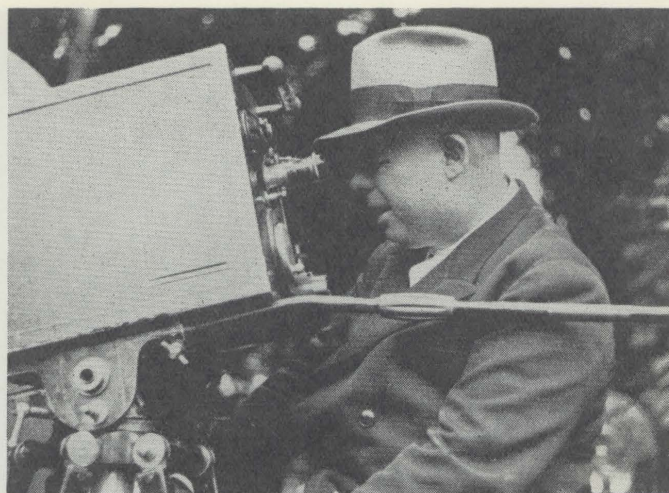
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ONCE UPON a time, in the dim past, I made some historical films. They contained horses, armour, pikes, plumes, farthingales—in fact, everything one could possibly want. But happily for me the lives of all films are short; negatives have a habit of getting lost and positive copies wear out. I sincerely hope that all trace of those celluloid masquerades has disappeared and that no knight in armour from my early days will play me a dirty trick by charging suddenly on to some screen and covering me with confusion.

Well, then, the commercial cinema world divides films into two categories: modern and historical.

Modern films are those in which the action is supposed to take place in our own times.

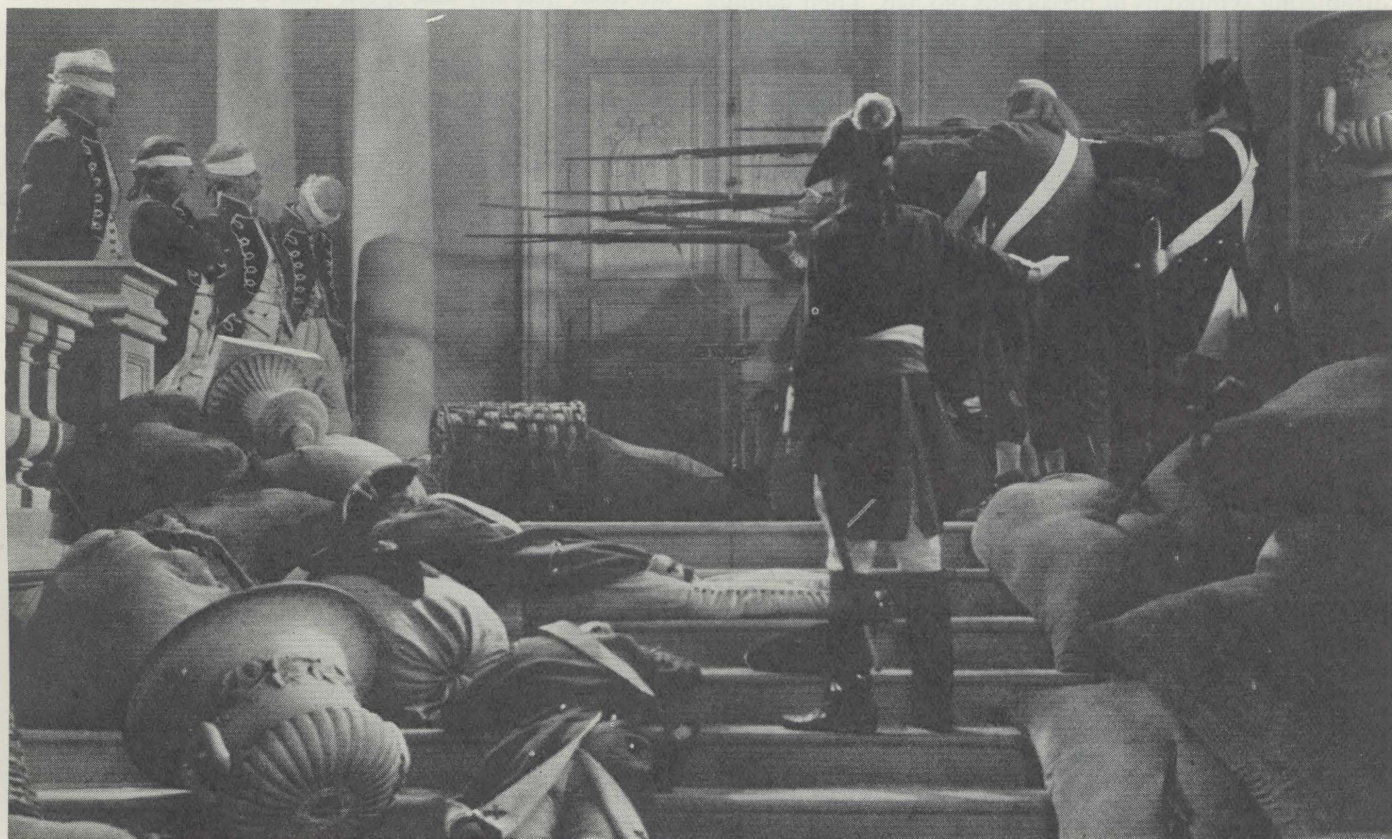
Historical films are supposed to deal with the past. They



deal with it, of course, in different ways—sometimes they tend to make us cry, sometimes they attempt to make us laugh—but always, always their action takes place in one single, unchangeable era—"The Historical Age". Or, if you prefer it, in "Olden Times", which may mean anything from the reign of Sesostrius to the days of Poincaré.

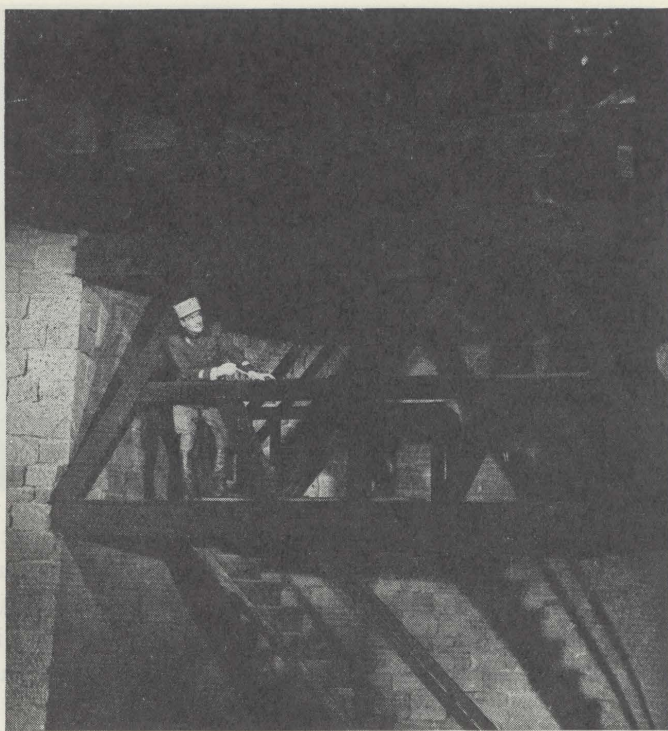
This grouping together of all the ages into one heading, "Olden Times", is very convenient for the wardrobe mistresses, since it enables them to use the same dress over a tightly laced corset to clothe Catherine de Medici, la Dame de Chez Maxim's, Queen Victoria and Mata Hari.

Resigning myself to the certainty of making many



*La Marseillaise*





*La Grande Illusion*

enemies, I am going to avow to you that I do not really believe in this classification of films into Modern and Historical. I know a lot of "modern" pictures which show disquieting symptoms of precocious old age. Their authors wish us to believe they are modern for commercial reasons, but I'm not such a fool as to be taken in. The characters in these films are so unlike us, their conversation and their dress so strange, that I'm convinced that, despite their telephones, their railways and their autogyros, they belong not only to another epoch but another world than our own. I know perfectly well that I haven't the slightest chance of meeting a woman dressed like Marlene Dietrich in the street or a girl who talks like Cecile Sorel.

Talking about language, another curious characteristic is that people in modern and historical films alike speak exactly the same language and have exactly the same vocabulary. This, perhaps, is self-explanatory. One sees the expression of the same theory in the fact that in the army bodies of men with very different uniforms—for example, the light infantry and the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*—are equipped with similar weapons and obey similar commands.

I am, in fact, beginning to believe that all films are made by one single individual who changes his name in case he should be accused of pluralism. Accordingly, I'm proposing that there should be a great simplification. Let us combine the two categories of films into one single class and declare that films are neither "historical" or "modern" but, quite simply, "realistic".

I have tried to make out of *La Marseillaise* a film worthy

of admission to this latter honourable class. Obviously our characters had to have long hair and their clothes had to approximate as nearly as we could make them to those worn by our great-great-grandparents some 150 years ago. But, after all, an officer of the Revolution does not look more bizarre than one belonging to the modern *Garde Republicain* or a cadet from St. Cyr, while the hats worn by the "fashionables" of 1792 are in far better taste than the ones worn by our womenfolk of to-day. As to the language spoken by the revolutionaries, it is no stranger than the flung about currently at one of our election meetings.

More than once I have had occasion to produce films whose contents did not quite correspond to the normal classification, and I have been very lucky. For example, it was encouraging for me that the management of cinemas showing *La Grande Illusion* were not put off by the fact that it was known as a "War Film". And God knows that that label has been given to a number of disgusting and sickly efforts at pictures.

I did everything in my power not to let them down over *La Marseillaise*. In spite of its pompous and dusty label of "historical film", we have tried to make it a simple and human story. It is also a good story. I can say that all the more easily as, just as in the case of *La Grande Illusion*, it is not fiction. I sought out my characters for *La Marseillaise* from the real world, and I can say truthfully that I've met these men of Marseilles! (For the people in the film really are from that city and speak with a local accent which for once in while justifies the film's title.) They are young, they fit the parts, they are unassuming, and they bring to life, quite simply and without fuss, one of the greatest periods of our history. When I met them after much research through old records and books I was immediately seized with the desire of letting you know about them. I hope you will admire them as much as I do. That would be the best reward we could have.

### *Renoir and His Films*

Jean Renoir was the second son of the famous painter and first became well known as a result of the dream sequence in his film "*La Fille de l'Eau*". The heroine of this, and others of his films—including "*Nana*," which was shown by the London Film Institute Society last February—was his wife, Catherine Hessling, who has been described as "the greatest actress the French Cinema ever produced." His other pictures include "*La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes*," "*Le Bled*," "*Le Tournoi dans la Cité*" and, of course, "*La Grande Illusion*" and "*La Marseillaise*."



## CRITIC OR REPORTER?

GUY MORGAN, *Film Reporter of the Daily Express*, answers the attacks so often made on the film critics of the "popular press" and adds that, "so far from being a malignant type of moron, the national film journalist in the main tries to do a difficult job to the best of his ability"

THE FILM critic of many a national newspaper, scanning the cinema trade journals recently for news of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association's summer conference, might be pardoned for imagining he heard the tumbrels rattle.

"Guedalla Trounces the Critics" said the headlines. "Thank you, Mr. Guedalla", was the unanimous editorial comment.

Highbrow writer, technical writer, fan magazine contributor and cinema trade journalist have always been unanimous in condemnation of the film critic or columnist of national daily and weekly papers.

The popular film journalist, being on the whole busier and better paid, seldom finds opportunity to reply.

The cinema trade has a special word for these pariahs of the industry.

We are the "lay" press.

There is no evidence that any popular film critic, even after as many as thirty years of film journalism, has ever been accorded the mysterious "ordination" which goes with employment on a trade, fan, or technical journal.

### UNFROCKING . . .

In cases where members of the "ordained" press graduate to a national newspaper, unfrocking follows automatically.

Attacks upon the "lay" reviewer of motion pictures by his "ordained" colleagues usually fall under the following heads: his levity, irresponsibility and ignorant sensationalism (trade press); his boorishness, inaccuracy and gullibility (fan press); his lack of artistic appreciation and his venality (highbrow and technical press); his low standard of mentality and literary ability (Mr. Guedalla).

Perhaps this is unfair to Mr. Guedalla.

In spite of the prominence given to his "trouncing" of the critics in the trade headlines, the reports of his speech did not define the grounds of his denunciation.

In twenty odd paragraphs which followed that particular headline, and in which Mr. Guedalla reviewed the function of the Film Council, the working of the Films Act, the state of British and American film production, I could find only three lines referring to the critics.

"At that moment," Mr. Guedalla was reported to have said, "the trade got very little guidance apart from trade press. In the National press they had some of the worst critics in any field."

Nor was editorial comment more explicit.

### . . . AND AN ENCYCLICAL

Congratulating Mr. Guedalla for rebuking "the bumptious attitude of the lay press towards the film industry" and the "inconsequential absurdities often passed off as reviews of new films" the editorial incumbent of "Today's Cinema" (June 24) issued the following encyclical: "The public rely

on these so-called critics for their guide to weekly entertainment. That reliance must be surely tried.

"For some time now we in the trade have smarted under this treatment. There have been occasional protests but subsequent behaviour has indicated that they have not been received with anything like the attention due to a great industry. . . .

"Only joint action can meet the situation. Here's hoping that the next time you come amongst us the problem will have been dealt with through one voice. It can be done. Why delay?"

The shadow of the guillotine falls across Shoe Lane.

Censure is not confined to the trade dailies.

In "Sight and Sound" (winter issue) Paul Rotha wrote, more in pity than in anger, of "those who drearily drag out the columns of our dailies with senseless stuff to the call of the advertising manager."

We are, you gather, a low form of literary life.

Looking for canons of this reliability in examples of "ordained criticism" is apt to prove confusing to the "lay" reviewer of motion pictures.

In reviews of the same film carried by rival trade dailies on July 1, I find the following summarised sentence headings:—

1. "The star's work is distinguished by magnificent histrionic flashes while her handling of heavily emotional passages is amazingly good and her death scene worthy climax to a memorable portrayal . . . Moving emotional drama . . . brilliant performance alive with tremendous feeling . . . Deeply emotional fare and real heart appeal for every woman patron."

2. "Nebulous story . . . Stylized direction . . . does not compensate for general lack of action and blatant melodramatics of last reel. Exaggerated portraiture . . . Romantic posturings and heavily sentimentalised incident . . . Somewhat highflown dialogue with more than suspicion of over-emphasis. Story and style give little scope to artists . . . Many scenes unduly prolonged and movement generally on slow side . . . Average popular entertainment for star fans."

In face of such concerted censure and doubt as to the value of models praised by Mr. Guedalla, perhaps a "lay" critic of not many years standing may be forgiven for setting out a few facts, as they appear to him, in the hope of clearing away misconceptions which seem to surround the function and responsibilities of his job.

In the first place a "lay" critic owes nothing to the film industry. In spite of attempts to read Russian (or maybe Hungarian) gold into many of his lunches, it is the newspaper industry alone which pays for his suppers.

In nine cases out of ten he becomes a film critic not



because of previous knowledge of the film industry, but because of previous experience in journalism.

If there were no films to criticise, the odds are that he would still be employed by his newspaper as motoring correspondent, or, as some would prefer to have it, doyen of the tiny tots page.

Evidence of this is the reluctance of editors to appoint outside experts from the cinema trade or film production, preferring to reward deserving members of their own inside staff.

Conversely the "lay" critic's first responsibility is to his editor, for a feature in his paper that people, not necessarily filmgoers, will read on its own merits.

From this arises the first necessity of his job—to be entertaining. If, in attempting this, what he writes proves notoriously inaccurate, biased, inept, frivolous or venal, his newspaper will suffer before the film industry, and his editor will automatically relieve the film trade of the necessity of manning the barricades in a holy crusade.

The film critic of a national daily or weekly paper, must assume that ninety per cent of his readers live outside Wardour Street, outside London and out of reach, for some three months, of the films he criticises; that they are as little interested in trade or production technicalities as they are in his own personal opinions and idiosyncracies.

It is the assumption of a "holy estate of criticism" which causes much of the suspicion with which the industry sometimes regards him.

#### REPORTER, NOT CRITIC

There is no difference between the film critic of a popular newspaper and a reasonably observant film fan except that the former has more regular opportunities for seeing films, wider standards of comparison and greater practice in summing up films quickly according to the journalistic requirements of his paper.

For this reason "film reporter" is a fairer designation than "film critic".

His approach is of necessity more informative than critical. His criteria are based on comparison, by reason of seeing some 250 films regularly each year.

Nor is it in his province (in my submission) ever to be

entirely adverse in his criticism of any film. This is not from subservience to advertising managers, but common sense that he cannot hope to gauge the likes or dislikes of 20 million film goers any more than he can reasonably expect one million or two million readers to share his personal phobias.

It is common sense, too, that people prefer to read of films they can reasonably look forward to see, than of films they are being encouraged to avoid.

In addition to seeing between three and fourteen films in the first four days of every week, most of the critical "laity" must also report and simplify trade and production news. Neither here is lack of technical experience something to be held against him.

It is not so important that he should know himself as that he shall know where to find out and this is where the friendly co-operation of the trade and technical journalist is vital to either side.

It is only fair to say that I have always found this courtesy willingly extended.

Perhaps one reason why the "lay critic" is sometimes regarded as a parasitical growth is that he seldom has the opportunity of taking any constructive part in the industry he criticises.

#### NOT MORONS

In Hollywood the critic often plays the useful part of the guinea-pig to film production. Hitherto untried dishes are placed before him at the modern equivalent of a Borgia banquet.

Should four out of five critics fail to recuperate, the offending dish is frequently shipped back to the studio kitchens for rehashing before release to a less hardy world.

With the recent revision of the law governing public previews in this country, as evidenced by the public tryout of films at the Folkestone conference, perhaps the British critic may also come to perform this extra service.

So far from being a malignant type of moron, the national film journalist in the main tries to do what is often a technically difficult and ill-defined job of work to the best of his ability.

Whether tipster, narrator, propagandist or wit, the essential thing is that he should always remain a fan.

## THE NATIONAL FILM LIBRARY

A NUMBER of exceptionally interesting films have been added to the Library's collection. Five new films have been added to the Loan Section: *Etching*, a craft film; *Eastern Valley*, a film of a social service experiment carried out in a Welsh mining valley; *Making China* and *Book Printing*, two industrial films; and *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, the story of fifty years of agricultural history of the Great Plains of America. The latter film is of particular interest in that it is the first documentary of its kind to have been made in America and represents the beginning of American interest in the type of documentary film which has hitherto been an achievement peculiar to this country: the director is Pare Lorentz. A further notable addition is *Drawings That Walk and Talk*, the composite film which the Library has just made from films in its collection to illustrate the history of the black-and-white film cartoon between 1906 and 1933. The film was made by Marie Seton and K. H. Frank, and the music arranged by Barbara Banner. It is a sound-film with running commentary and is available on 35mm. and 16mm. sizes.

Amongst numerable additions to the Preservation Section of the Library, *Marked Woman*, *The Life of Emil Zola*, *Don't Get Me Wrong*, *Farewell Again* and *Lost Horizon* may perhaps be mentioned as notable amongst the modern feature films. Negatives of two silent films produced in 1926, *Nell Gwynn* and *The Only Way*, have also been presented to the Library by the producers. Amongst documentary material the Library has received a copy of Dr. Julian Huxley's film, *The Private Life of the Gannets*, ten reels of film of the relief work carried out by the Society of Friends in Europe immediately after the War, a number of important items from the British Movietone news issues including the sinking of the *Panay*, the signing of the Anglo-Italian pact, and polling scenes in Germany at the time of the Austrian annexation. A series of early newsreel films including one of the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarvon, were given by Mr. T. H. Williamson. Mr. R. W. Paul, the film pioneer, has also generously presented a print of his famous film of the 1896 Derby.



## A PIONEER

*"It is later than you think" reads the inscription on an old sundial, and already the pioneers of the cinema are leaving. In the last issue we published a posthumous article by Georges Méliès. Below ALBERTO CAVALCANTI—you know him for "North Sea" and other pictures—tells of the life of an English expert in trick photography*

IT MAY SEEM preposterous to compare Hollywood and its craze for slapstick with Versailles during Louis XV reign where the Court went all gay and thought that only charades, music and dance really mattered. It seems preposterous because the tumbling of Miss Hepburn's angular person, the punching of Miss Lombard's nose or the crooning of Jimmy Cagney do not particularly suggest the elegance of Lancrét's shepherds or the preciousness of Marivaux's concetti.

But then, sociologists explain the frivolity of the French Court by the approaching Revolution; and very likely Hollywood is heading, too, with its actual hysteria, to an important crisis.

The dramatic actors, when they tackle comedy, instead of going for inspiration to the purer sources, went to the new comedians such as the Marx and Ritz Brothers. The style of these two teams being jerky and artificial is nearer to music-hall than cinema. The result of their influence is not always successful, and the improvised new clowns are, most of the time, no better than mere amateurs.

Anyway, there is a strange lack of real humour in the fashionable films of to-day, and it is said that Laurel and Hardy are no longer box office, while Chaplin and Lloyd only do a film every three or four years!

### A LOST TRADITION

The tradition of real film comedy seems to be getting lost. . . . But then Hollywood makes a point of ignoring traditions.

What this possible crisis we mentioned will be, it is difficult to forecast; but prestige is wearing quickly and dramatic films like *The Front Page*, *Hi Nellie*, quite ordinary at the time, are almost as rare now as the real

comedies. And the great film acting as achieved by Gloria Swanson or Ernest Torrence exists no more.

As for fantasy, it has completely vanished except in the cartoons, and when it occurs outside these, like in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is so elaborate and arty, that it becomes unbearable.

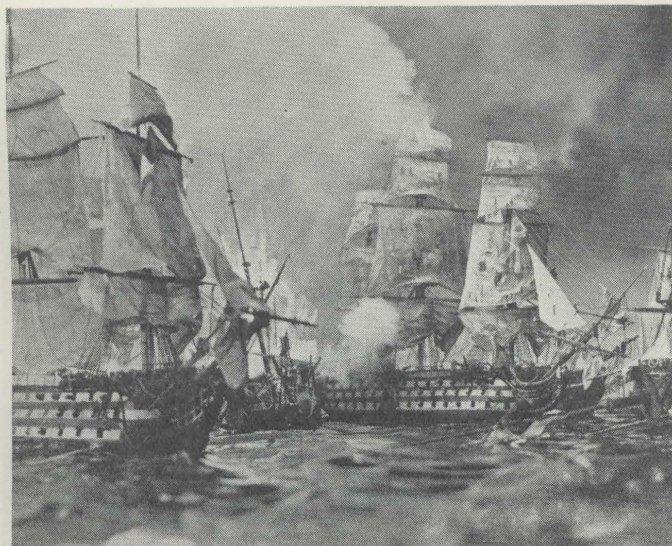
What a chance for English and French producers! They must hurry. The early generation who started in comedy, who created real film drama, who believed in trick films and who, in short, made films what they ought to be, is fast disappearing.

### EDWARD CHARLES ROGERS

After Méliès and Cohl in France, here in England on June the 5th, 1938, died, at the age of sixty-eight, one of their contemporaries, less known perhaps, but no less interesting. It was Edward Charles Rogers.

Unlike Méliès, he belonged to an old family of artists. His father was a set designer for the old Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells Theatres. His uncle, Richard Barnard, ran a famous puppet show, and young Rogers worked for both.

Like many young Englishmen of the late Victorian period he ran away to sea in a sailing ship. Somewhere in the Mediterranean he was shipwrecked and came back home much the wiser. And here, for a young artist full of imagination, what a great number of amazing opportunities there are! These young artists did not make the same mistake as that of their contemporary critics. They did not go in for post-romantic painting or finicky sculpture. They were interested in the Crystal Palace exhibitions and in things like "Poole's Myrioramas". For in these were the foundations of the most lively art in England.



Courtesy Gaumont British





## THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

Poole's hand-out said, "the unanimous opinion of the Press and public placed these productions in the very foremost rank for artistic merit, variety of subjects, marvelous mechanical effects and finished detail. No two of these Myrioramas are alike in any particular, etc."

Edgar Rogers with his brother, Arthur, was responsible for many of these. Using his own personal recollections he constructed *The Shipwreck*. History and actuality gave other themes: *The Battle of Trafalgar*, *The Visit of the Prince of Wales (Edward the VII) to India*, *The Coronation of King Alfonso of Spain*, and *The Russo-Japanese War*, etc. In most of these big "tableaux" many of the "characters moved by mechanical means, and gas lighting was carefully thought out to give the most realistic effects". Each presentation was accompanied by a sort of running commentary spoken by a barker. Shortly after, Méliès presented in the same way on the screen his *Coronation of King Edward the VII*. These were really the first *March of Time* items.

## NEW DEVICES

From Poole's to films was only a step. In 1911 Edgar Rogers joined Charles Urban's Company as an art director. This company was called "Kineto and Kinemacolour". They made among other things Wild West films. The art director, like everybody else, had to become a cowboy or an Indian, according to the needs of the moment.

The ingenuity of Edgar Rogers was bound to influence the films of his company. Owing to the difficulty of building large sets outside, often ruined by wind and rain, a man of his imagination could find new devices, such as that of painting part of the set on glass near to the camera, much the same as the modern Schuftan process. They tried talkies and colour, too.

But unexpected adventures are the lot of pioneers.

In a colour film called *Santa Claus* (1912) there was a scene showing the world travelling through space with Santa Claus driving his sledge in pursuit. It was an entirely mechanical model of terrific dimensions. The world travelled on a track 100 ft. long behind clouds of painted glass. The background was a huge black velvet curtain, which was torn by a storm and had to be mended with great difficulty.



Also in 1912, jointly with Martin Thornton, Edgar Rogers made the first puppet film in colour, *The War in Toyland*. The dolls, three inches high, lived in a city built of playing cards, chessmen, dice and dominoes. The city was raided and set on fire by a fleet of model aeroplanes and airships. (All this sounds very much like a sort of pre-Disney affair.) There was a forest scene as well, in which the trees were all made of sticks of real rhubarb. It took several days to photograph a scene frame by frame, lights were hot and the rhubarb withered. But this, fortunately, heightened the effect of a raging storm which brought destruction to the enemy soldiers.

## STAGE AND SCREEN

Time passed, and Edgar Rogers kept working for the stage or the screen, bringing to both his sense of spectacle and precision of mind.

The Film Library will most certainly preserve two New-Era Films: *Q Ships* for which he did the models, and *The Battle of the Somme*, whose reconstruction was an advance on his earlier Poole's work.

For the Hippodrome Revue, *Round in Fifty*, with George Robey, Rogers did the motor-boat scene, which is quite famous in stage history.

He was known and respected as a first-rate technician, and was lucky enough to keep in active work until the closing of the Gaumont British Studios at Shepherds Bush, shortly before he died. The ships for the Battle of Trafalgar in the film *Jack Ahoy* were, I believe, his last work there.

## AND FINALLY

But somehow his death didn't break the chain; three of his four sons are cameramen and his two daughters are negative cutters.

Edgar Rogers did not know the grandeurs of Pinewood and Denham. When one sees the big films of to-day and thinks about such fine examples of craftsmanship as his, one is bound to regret somehow, the hard, impersonal powerfulness of the new industry; this new industry which ignores such a precious element as old Rogers; this new industry which imitates Hollywood, believes that it can live without traditions—traditions which will remain one of the greatest riches of European cinema.



A Set in 1913





*Jonge Harten*

*Lumina-Film*

## FORTY YEARS

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*All Holland is being organised in preparation for Queen Wilhelmina's Jubilee. The film industry also is taking its part according to WINIFRED HOLMES in this article describing the conditions in the Netherlands*

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VISITING HOLLAND for the first time one is struck by the sturdy individuality of the people and of their towns and buildings. Here is a country robustly sure of itself; independent, self-contained, partaking of general European culture but with a culture and character of its own which have grown up through the centuries. Taking what they want from elsewhere and assimilating it, the Dutch people are never mere followers of a new fashion; nor does their conservatism and caution lead them into a backward-looking medievalism.

More than any other territorially small country in Europe, they have a natural force and independence of action usually the attributes of a first-class Power.

It is a great pity, therefore, that this force and independent character cannot find expression in the cinema. Economically the actual physical fact of Holland's size, and that so few people speak her language, make an entertainment film industry on a national scale impossible.

Further the very individualism and independence of character which are Holland's strength work against it. Suspicion and unwillingness to co-operate are the inverse side of the medal, and I heard many accusations from informed and impartial people of producers, distributors and exhibitors cutting one another's throats. The result is that the tale of the Dutch cinema is one of sporadic bursts of

productive energy; failure to obtain proper distribution and so to win popularity; drying up of financial springs; and creative and technical talent lying idle and discouraged.

At present, however, just as the whole nation is being drawn together in preparation for Queen Wilhelmina's Jubilee this summer, the cinema, too, is sharing in the national effort. A full-length feature film—*Veertig Jaren* (*Forty Years*)—is now in production at the Filmstadt, the studios at Wassenaar, near the Hague, and is using as many of Holland's screen talents as possible. This film will, of course, have nation-wide distribution and should also be popular abroad because of its subject, so perhaps it will induce further co-operative efforts in the future.

Its producer, Guus Ostwalt, is already planning a big van Gogh film to follow *Veertig Jaren*. Holland did not appreciate our version of the life of *Rembrandt*, and is determined to treat the life of another of her great painters herself. Edmond Greville (*Remous*, *Marchand D'Amour*, *Mademoiselle Docteur*) will direct it as he is now directing *Veertig Jaren* for Ostwalt. Apart from his cameraman Otto Heller, a Czech, the rest of the production is entirely Dutch.

Johan de Meester, assistant director, has assisted Rutten; Otto van Neyenhoff, second cameraman, has worked with Mannus Franken, turned on *Jonge Harten* and



himself made two excellent short documentary films—*Zee* and *Rijksmuseum*, the latter the official film of the National Museum in Amsterdam. J. G. Theunissen, editor and cutter, made the historical film of William of Orange—*Wilhelm van Oranje*—and has collaborated on cartoon films with Jo Spier. The scenario and screen-play were written by Ben van Eysselsteyn; Leo P. Ruygrok, a well-known composer, is writing the music and A. H. Wegerif, a painter, is in charge of the art direction. This particular job is extremely important as the film is really a social document of the forty years of the Queen's reign. Every detail must be correct, and changing fashions in dress and interior decoration noted carefully. Period furniture is being lent and also family heirlooms and jewels to the amount of thousands of guilders; costumes are copied from fashion-plates and portraits. The Queen herself is acting as advisor-in-chief and went into the script with detailed care before she approved it.

The actors are the best in Holland, and Dutch actors, Greville tells me, make wonderful cinematic material as they adapt their stage technique to the camera with ease and have no tricks or mannerisms to unlearn. I watched the "extras"—a new job for all of them—celebrating the Queen's coronation by a *poffertjes-kraam*, the Dutch equivalent of a *kermesse*, on the floor. Their spontaneity and unselfconsciousness before the camera was a delight, and the Old Masters themselves would have felt quite at home in the uproarious scene. No audience should be able to resist this gusto of enjoyment—a traditional national characteristic.

As in *Cavalcade* the film tells its story by means of a group of ordinary people—a doctor and his family in Amsterdam and a rich industrialist and his wife in Brabant. The real story is the progress of Holland during the forty years; events in the Royal family; the war and its swarms of Belgian refugees; the growth of Socialism as a creed and a political force and its final *rapprochement* with the owners of factories such as Mijnheer Maasdonk of Brabant; depression and financial recovery; improvement in social services—railways, air services, etc.—and the progress of the Colonies. The real though unseen heroine of the film

is the Queen herself whom Holland recognises as a ruler of force and shrewdness and to whom she attributes much of her sanity and stability.

There is little further film activity going on at present. The combined railway companies are planning a documentary to celebrate the anniversary of the first Dutch railway—from Amsterdam to Haarlem. Jo de Haas, brilliant maker of *De Ballade van den Hoogen Hoed* (*Ballad of the Top Hat*) is reported to be riding about the country on the railways prospecting for it, but beyond that there are no details available.

A new organisation called Multi-Coloured-Cultural-Films intends to make in Haarlem "cultural" films in colour. There are also two excellent Dutch newsreels—*Polygoon* and *Profilti*—which carry on their job as usual. A newsreel was started not long ago in the colonies—Java, Bali, Sumatra—but owing to the difficulty of getting topical material and because of the small market, the enterprise failed.

Films so far have not been included in schools' programmes, but this may change soon as Holland is thorough and modern in her educational system. Only lack of the right organisation and of funds have so far prevented it. American films are preferred to French, while Pop-Eye is streets ahead of Walt Disney's creations in popularity. The Dutch love his robust and husky person and find Disney's creatures rather too pretty in comparison. Film censorship is very strict in this Calvinistic country and something is usually cut out of very foreign importation.

Critical writing about the cinema is of a very high standard. In Jan Hulsker (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*) and Charles Boost (*Der Tijd*) Holland has two critics with a real understanding of the medium rare in any country.

So much for present activity. The past is a somewhat tragic tale of brilliant efforts on the part of cineastes and avant-gardists whose work has had little encouragement from distributor or public. Joris Ivens is the greatest of these film-makers, and for some time he has had to look outside Holland for opportunities of using his talent.

His first film was *De Brug*, a documentary of the elevator bridge in Rotterdam, made in 1928. Later came *Zuider Zee*,



*Jonge Harten*

Lumina-Film



*Regen (Rain)* with Mannus Franken; *Branding (Surf)*, a story film also with Franken, and an advertising film for *Philips Fabrieken*. Then he left Holland, and co-operating with Henry Storck of Belgium, made a film of the Belgian mining district, *Le Borinage*; then he went to Russia to make *Komsomolz* and recently to Spain for *Spanish Earth* with Hemingway. Now he is supposed to be in China.

Gerard Rutten is known in England for his *Dood Water (Dead Water)*, the film about the draining of the Zuider Zee and its effect on the fishermen whose job and life were traditional, and who had suddenly to turn into landmen working in the earth for their living. This was one of the greatest problems Holland had to face; her people are conservative and violent in their defence of liberties and the Zuider Zee fishermen were obstructive and difficult to a degree which made the work extremely hard to carry off successfully. Although the film was slow, it reflected the tenacious character of the people and the slow tempo of their lives and movement. Before this Rutten made an earlier version of the same subject, *Terra Nova*, but it was a failure.

A film group, "Visie", under the direction of Jo de Haas, has made several documentary films sponsored by industry. One called *Nederland* was made for the Dutch Travel Association in 1934, and this year the group made *Hier Schiphol!*, a film of Schiphol, the Amsterdam airport, for the K.L.M. Royal Dutch Airlines. Jo de Haas's own *avant-garde* film, *The Ballad of the Top Hat*, is a delightful and brilliantly ironic treatment of the adventures of this symbol of certain events in modern times. An old fisherman, typical of all Holland, sits by the canal-bank fishing to the sound of the "orgel", the ubiquitous street-organ pulled always by a horse, when a top hat comes floating downstream towards him. Through his mind waver images of what the hat symbolises—diplomats at a Peace Conference with their bald heads, signing innocent people like himself into war, a marriage ceremony, an auction, the increased social status of the buyer of the top-hat, a golden wedding celebration; the hat going down in the world and gracing the head of a street singer who, chased by the police, loses it; its conversion into a football for local urchins and finally its death by drowning in the canal.

Other interesting films, some of the *avant-garde* type, were *Komedie om Geld (Comedy of Money)* by Max Ophuls, *Lenteliep (Spring Song)* by Simon Koster, the two films made by the cartoonist Jo Spier, *Pieremont* (typical wheelbarrow organ) and *Sjabbos* (Friday night in the Amsterdam ghetto), *De Steeg (The Alley)* by Jan Koelinga, *Kentering (The Turn)* on Roman Catholic social developments after the Papal Bull of the Quadregesimo anno by Jan Hin, and *Sparen (Saving)* by Kees Stroobank. J. C. Mol has made films on microscopic life and on plants and fishes, and also a publicity film for the Drosta Chocolate factory, while the films of George Pal for Philips' lamps and radio are well-known over here for their wit, imagination, brilliance of colour and crisp technique.

The Dutch equivalent of our Film Society, the *Nederlandische Filmliga*, founded ten years ago, helped these *avant-garde* and documentary film-makers tremendously. It ran its own magazine and was powerful enough to found a theatre, *De Uitkijk*, in Amsterdam, and a studio in Rotterdam. Unfortunately its influence waned and it came to an end. The *Nieuwe Filmliga*, started two years ago, is trying to carry on the same work, but because of customs barriers it is difficult to get hold of interesting film material from other countries. Public interest, too, has waned. This

is a great pity because the young cinema-goers have little or no encouragement to see good films.

So when two young men, H. M. Josephson and C. Huguenot van der Linden, made a charming open-air story film last year, they could find neither financial aid or proper distribution. This film, *Jonge Harten (Young Hearts)* is perfectly delightful and has a freshness of theme and a pristine quality not often found in this far from natural or pristine medium of celluloid. On the island of Texel there is a students' camp. The young men and girls live an Arcadian life of swimming, sun-bathing, cooking, singing and being a little in love. An older woman, married and with a child, but still young and attractive, comes to the island and brings trouble which leads to tragedy. Two of the young men are flattered by her interest and neglect their girls; one swims out to rescue the woman who has been trapped on a shifting sandbank and is drowned. The tale is very simple, but the camera-work is beautiful, the acting—all amateur local talent—natural and charming, and although a little slow in tempo and inexperienced in technique, this is a delightful production of which any country could be proud. One of the girls has now been snapped up by Hollywood, and the second, Marthe Posno, who plays the flute and charms the black-and-white Friesian cows, is acting in *Veertig Jaren*.

The history of the commercial industry is brief. In 1910 a film studio was opened in Haarlem and "wildly romantic popular dramas", as a critic calls them, such as *The Living Ladder*, *Dark Amsterdam* and *Pale Bess*, were made. Annie Bos was the great star and her leading man was Louis Bouwmeester, Holland's greatest stage actor. This phase ended in 1919.

Another attempt to form an industry was made in Rotterdam ten years later by Kleinman, but this was a failure. In 1933 Jaap Speyer, a German of Dutch origin, produced *De Jantjes (The Tars)* at the Cine-tone studios, Amsterdam. The film was such a great success that it gave the impetus to a national industry, but under foreign direction. In 1934, '35 and '36, about thirty films were made, all inferior artistically but very popular. They exploited the Cockney of Amsterdam and reproduced popular farces, dramas and stage-hits, until people became tired of their inferior technique and preferred importations from America.

At last a more serious and worthy subject was found in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, made in 1936. Directed by Ludwig Berger with Lily Bouwmeester in the chief part, it was a great popular success. There were no attempts to speed up the action, but the Dutch public enjoyed the dialogue immensely and admired the acting. Lily Bouwmeester takes the chief part in *Veertig Jaren*.

The UFA company of Germany has tried to invade the Dutch market by making films in both German and Dutch, but they have been too poor in quality to win much popularity. It is to be hoped that soon the Dutch will marshal their remarkable film talents and produce feature or documentary films on a nationally co-operative basis. It is too bad that so much creative vitality and technical skill are wasting, and such a unique culture and strong sense of nationality could be expressed and shown to the rest of the world better in films than in any other medium.

(I should like to express my thanks to Jan Hulsker, Charles Boost and Huguenot van der Linden for their great kindness in helping me with information and taking me to see the shooting of *Veertig Jaren*, and the screening of *Jonge Harten* and *The Ballad of the Top Hat*.)



# I FILMED IN MADRID

by HAROLD LOWENSTEIN

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*"To-day the Studios must lie in the middle of No-Man's Land"*

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IT WAS A long time before Franco started to pound Madrid to pieces when I arrived there. Travelling from London to the CEA studios at Ciudad Lineal necessitated changing at Madrid's North Station. From there one crossed the city by Metro, and at Ventas there was a tram which ran right past the studio gates. Outside the Norte, upon the hill, lay the town, set down bang in the centre of Spain, by an ambitious king. I travelled by Metro. In the train there was a blind beggar playing a guitar. At Ventas I left the badly-lit platform and met the intense azure of the crisp winter sky which created a vivid impact on the eyes. Outside the Underground I had to wait for the tram, which gave me time to eat the most delicious oil-baked buns. I dipped them in my goatmilk coffee and enjoyed that peculiar Madrid quality which is called "*mucho animacion*". It was created by the crowd of workers who filled the café each morning. They were on the new bullring job.

The tram was a lumbering affair, made up of two or three coaches. The lines were very worn and it wasn't an infrequent happening for the tram to be derailed. We passed down the squalid road which led out of town towards the Getaffe Airport. There were young girls, sometimes with platinum-dyed hair, carrying pitchers of water on their heads. Ragged barefoot boys jumped the tram and sold the early editions of the local papers. The wind cut down from the Sierra Guarrama, ice-laden but soft and insinuating. It raced across the fifty miles of dead flat plateau and caught you as you got off the tram. There was always someone at the studio who had lost their voice; the streets were full of people with bandaged throats.

## A FILM OF NATIONS

Production was starting in what was to be the greatest Spanish film ever made. Technicians came from all over the world. The production manager was American; the director, German; the head cameraman, Austrian; the chief

operator, Hungarian. One of the assistants was Rumanian and there were also some Spaniards. Of course the actors and actresses were Spanish and so was their supervisor, Vives Giner, son of the famous composer, Amadeo Vives, whose operette *Dona Francisquita*, was being produced. The Madrid Press, filled with the charms of the usual publicity barrage, was plastered with news about the film.

## RAQUEL HAD A MOTHER

Raquel Rodrigo played the lead as *Dona Francisquita*. The actors came out of town in a special bus and in it came Raquel and mother. They lived in a rather dreary block of flats not far from the embassies and overlooking a couple of tennis courts. The flats have probably been blown to bits by now. Raquel must have been the only girl in Spain to have been through a university and then to have gone on the films. She was very intelligent and spoke French fluently. She tried to make me teach her the words of an American dance tune which was the rage of the moment. Off the set at the studio she would sing to the accompaniment of the head architect. I believe he loved playing the piano even more than planning sets. His ambition was to work in England. *La Señora* was never far away. Wherever Raquel went, her mother went too. You could see her sitting just off the set, for hour upon hour, knitting. I remember talking to Raquel at the family flat. She told me that when she wasn't working she went to the pictures every day. We had to leave the door open so that *La Señora* could hear us in the next room. That was Spain all over. The Great War had left it untouched. Society was still run in the pre-war way. Chaperones went everywhere. It was considered immodest for a woman to walk the Castellena—Madrid's Piccadilly—uncorseted. Women went shopping from six until nine each evening and then they went home.

## NUDITY AN ACCEPTED THING

After the first day's work, I was sent to the Romeo in order to absorb atmosphere. This was one of the most respectable music halls in town, and proved of little interest, complete nudity on the stage being an accepted thing in all Latin countries. It was not until I visited Andalusia that I really saw some brilliant Spanish dancing. There one came across a wealth of regional dances and heard the primitive rhythms of the fandango and flamenco. There was a very bad production hold-up. Huge floodlights were needed to light a large daylight street scene, and there weren't enough lights in the city of Madrid. The American RCA, the German AEG and the English Westinghouse agencies couldn't help us. We wired Barcelona with no avail. The nearest effective lights lay in Paris, a matter of

*"Raquel Rodrigo played the Lead"*





twenty-four hours by express. There was only a single line from the frontier and the ordinary trains, made up largely of freight cars, had to be side tracked for hours. This meant that Paris was two or three days away for the needed floodlights. In desperation our contact man got into touch with the War Department and arranged for some Army searchlights to be sent along. The sappers in charge of them couldn't make the transformers work. A Swiss engineer, attached to an American newsreel sound unit, was found, and he understood transformers. He laboured continuously for thirty-six hours, and then collapsed with Madrid throat. Finally it was arranged to take only the night scenes in the studio, the day takes were to be shot on location. To old Madrid we went. Not a stone's throw from the Gran Via with its towering Telefonica building, lay a labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets echoing the shrill sound of the flamenco, often filled with the thick sickly smell of putrid oil. We were lent four mounted guards but they weren't tipped enough and so we had to do most of the work of keeping the hundreds of men, women and children back ourselves. It was a frantic job. Children kept breaking through into the camera-field. I found bribery a very potent force. I turned the worst offenders into guards and paid them a few centimos for the trouble.

Production hold-ups afforded a good opportunity to go to the pictures. Madrid had real picture palaces. For spaciousness and design they are unrivalled in Europe. In summer, the air-conditioned houses become a refuge from the torrid heat. There were a number of really well-planned newsreel houses, although the material they managed to obtain was fairly poor. There was only one newsreel edited in Madrid, that was done by Fox. Pathé edited a special edition in Paris, and the G.B. Magazine had a fairly good circulation. Soviet productions were shown by a local group of technicians on Sundays. Spanish productions were technically always poor. The new studios at Arenjuez, Madrid's Ascot, had plenty of brand new equipment, but they were turning out what amounted to quota quickies. However, outside Barcelona, Benito Perojo was showing great talent with small technical resources, and his films were received in Madrid with enthusiasm, although the local Press was quite convinced that native production must be bad, *per se*. Perojo had been educated in England, and had worked in France and the States. He told me that he wanted to make a film about the Colour Problem. *Se Ha Fugado Un Preso* (*A Fugitive had Escaped*) showed that he had a very fine feeling for emotional values and a desire to see the progressive forces and emancipations of the New World brought to his own country which was still in the grip of superstition and poverty. It is difficult to understand why he is filming in the reactionary territory in the present catastrophe.

#### MARTIAL LAW

Production went ahead. One morning the town was plastered with posters signed by the Governor of Madrid. They proclaimed martial law. No one stopped to read them. It has happened too often before. The absent landlords were sabotaging the Government's radical reforms. This forced the people to take matters into their own hands and a surge of lawlessness was sweeping the country. Coming back from the studio at night I heard the distant crack of rifle fire, while down the deserted

streets roared high-powered police cars, driven by tough leather-coated men, who looked as if they had stepped straight out of a Chicago thriller. On they went, with blaring sirens. According to Fleet Street, everyone was being searched. I did run into a squad of Assault Guards, rifles drawn, who were searching the streets for suspects, but I was never searched myself, except when I had to call at the local Scotland Yard. The atmosphere was full of rumours. It was said that the road was blockaded at Ventas. But when I got there next morning, on the way to work, everything was normal. At lunch-time we ate out in the open, sheltered from the wind, in the blazing sun. There were fresh oranges to be had. They came through the night on lorries from Valencia and the Levante. And then there were *tortillas*, those untranslatable Spanish omelettes which you can eat in Soho. Alonso, one of the sound-crew, used to bring his cooked lunch with him, and eat it cold. Just another old Spanish custom. "Allo, thees ees Mardreeth; allo thees ees Mardreeth!" Alonso would say to me, with no little pride, for he was the announcer for the local short-wave club which made radio-communication with enthusiastic English amateurs each week-end.

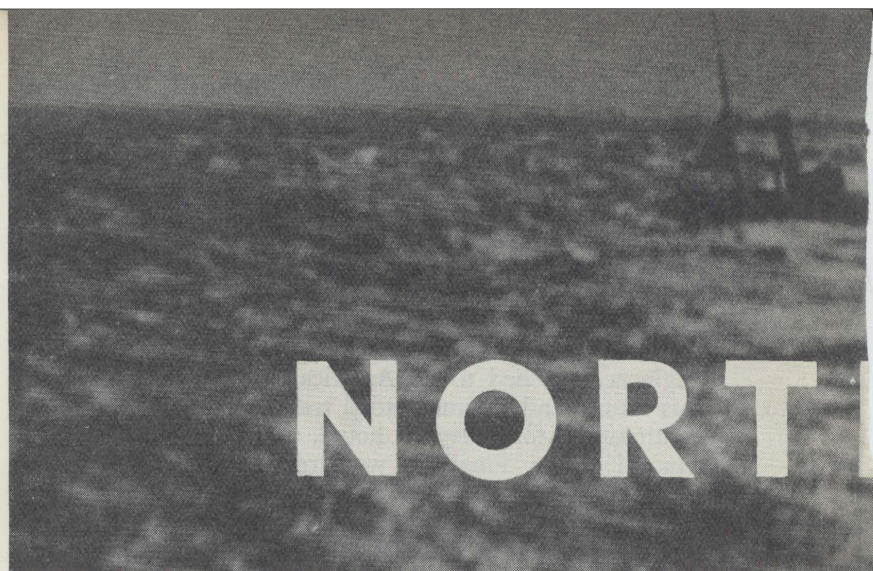
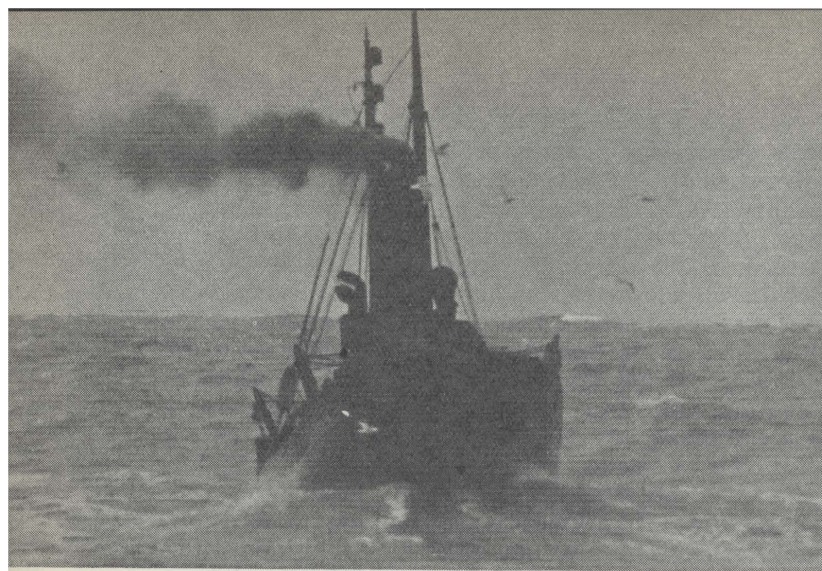
#### AN INSULTED SPANIARD

Towards the end of production, the political situation eased a little. A broadcast from the studio was arranged. It was hard pretending that we were in the middle of shooting, and it may have sounded very hollow, but as a publicity scoop it was a great success. Production was a slow business. The labs. down on the Plaza San Francisco were eternally saying "*manana*" and it was sometimes a week before the rushes came through. The only time I ever saw people running was when the cutting print caught on fire. Of course we had had many events on the floor. A sun fell off a side drop and crashed on to the set, just missing the director by inches; an insulted Spaniard nearly murdered someone else on the set, for an imagined slight against his father, the head carpenter. But when the print burst into flames with a terrific explosion, the musicians in the theatre, waiting for it to be run, ran like rabbits. It was an exciting scene in the glare which flashed through the projection windows, that dramatic stampede. Jimmy, the American production manager, kept his head and pulled the two boys out of the cabin. One was unconscious. We laid him out under a tree. Everyone was dashing around trying to save the film. I was rather foolish. I sent for a doctor. By the time he arrived, the operator had recovered. The next day they smoked as usual when lacing the film up. To-day the studios must lie in the middle of No Man's Land.



"The Cameraman was Austrian"





# NORTH

*North Sea* was produced for the G.P.O. Film Unit by Alberto Cavalcanti. It was directed by Harry Watt, assisted by Brian Pickersgill. H. Fowle and Jonah Jones were responsible for the photography and A. Meyer for the music. The players were fishermen from Aberdeen.

Below ROBERT FLAHERTY, producer of "Elephant Boy", "Man of Aran" and other films, reviews the film in an interview with SIGHT AND SOUND and declares that "it is one of the most significant shorts that has ever been made."

Watts and Cavalcanti's *North Sea* is one of the most significant short films that has ever been made. It breaks new ground, and the number of films that have done that are almost as rare as the proverbial hen's tooth.

*North Sea* is a story and a document rolled into one—a human, living story, and at the same time a document as real as a bond.

One of the big points about the picture is the title "Based on a real incident in the life of a fisherman in the North Sea." Now real incidents such as *North Sea* must be happening everywhere, every day. One can pick them from the press—incidents that if they were filmed would, as the *North Sea* film does, get right under the skin of this country and its people.

If there could only be here and now a series of films running through the cinemas like *North Sea* all at the same time, I am sure a vast new audience would plump for them at once. You would then wake up the right people—the people who hold the future of the films in the hollow of their hand, but never do anything but hold, and hold, and hold. When will they wake up? If *North Sea* doesn't start something, what will?

## The Story

Morning over Aberdeen and the fishing fleet is preparing for sea. One by one the crew of the *John Gillman* trawler leave their homes, their families, their wives and go down to the quay. With the dawn mists still over the water the *John Gillman* slips out of harbour.

"Where bound?"

Photographs courtesy



# H SEA

"North Sea!"

Fishing, fishing and a good catch. The Skip calls over his radio transmitter :

"Hullo, Wick Radio. *John Gillman* calling. I've a message in code. . . ."

Night and sleep and a rising sea. The morning shows tumbling waters, brings a wave greater than the rest, a wave that smashes and breaks over deck and bridge. Skip jumps from his bunk and surveys the damage, then, urgently :

"Hullo, Wick Radio. Hullo, Wick Radio. *John Gillman* calling. . . . We have been struck by a heavy sea. . . . Our pumps are out of action. . . ."

The aerial is carried away, but not before her position has been given. Follows silence and no news in Aberdeen, no news for wives and families, no news for the young girl anxious for her man.

Work, desperate work, for hour after hour. Numbed fingers on the hand pumps, numbed fingers removing waste matter from choked machinery. Always the waves and the wallowing sea.

Far away on shore tired men with headphones listen ceaselessly for the call that does not come.

Forty-eight hours, and the pumps move jerkily, settle down into healthy life. Up with the aerial, try it out. The sea is going down now as dance music bursts into the little, lonely cabin.

"Hullo, Wick Radio! *John Gillman* calling. I am testing my aerial. Over."

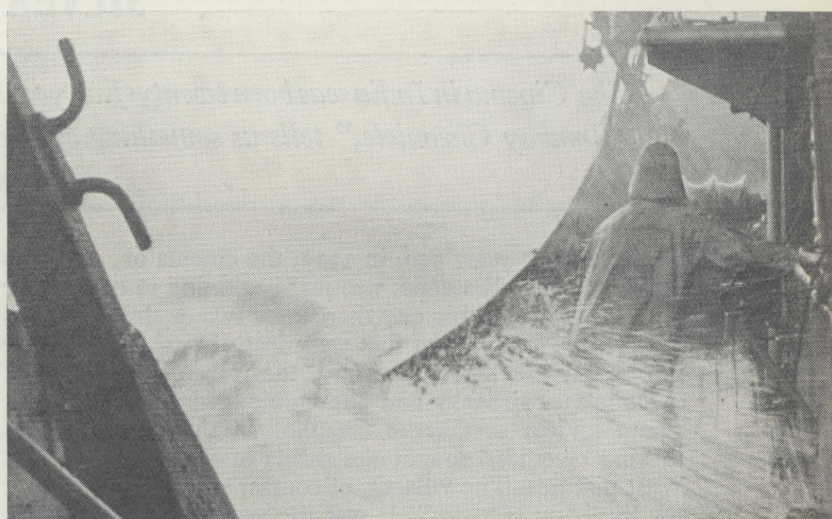
Tired men on shore jump jerkily to life. Clear the air for this message from brave men at sea.

"Hullo. *John Gillman*. Wick Radio calling. I can hear you!"

"Hullo, Wick Radio. *John Gillman* calling. Cancel the salvage tug. . . . We're all right now. Thanks for your assistance."

"Hullo, *John Gillman*. Wick Radio calling. That's all right, old man. Glad to have helped. . . ."

So it ends, and there will be peace for anxious hearts in Aberdeen.







Nanda Kumar

Jayashree Films

## SILVER JUBILEE

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*The Cinema in India was born twenty-five years ago. Below AHMAD ABBAS, Film Critic of the "Bombay Chronicle," tells us something of the history of a Western form of entertainment in an Eastern land . . .*

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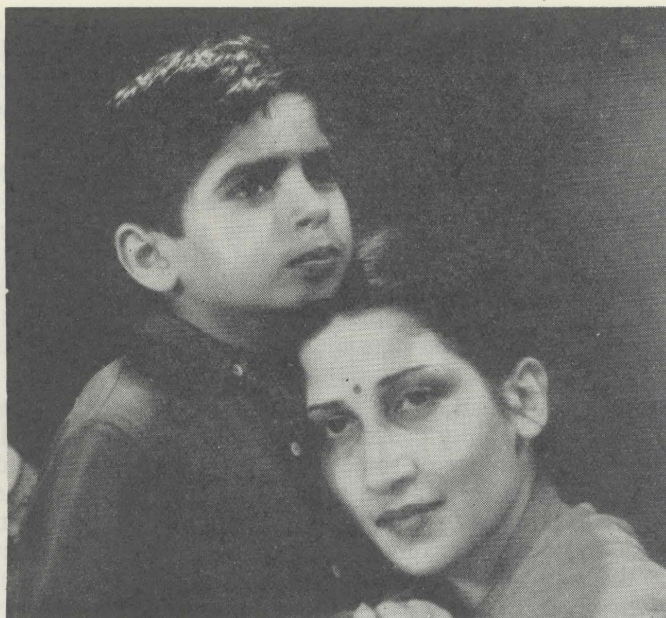
TWENTY-FIVE years ago, in 1913, the cinema or, as it was then called the Bioscope, was just beginning to be popular in India. In every big city there were two or three cinemas where the smart urban folk were learning to go mad over the beauty of a Mary Pickford, the romantic gallantry of a Douglas Fairbanks and the comic antics of a quixotic tramp known as Charlie Chaplin. In the smaller towns touring cinemas brought the thrills of Eddie Polo's Wild West pictures. The villages, of course, knew nothing about the "walking pictures". It was the year 1913 that saw the birth of the Indian film industry which thus celebrates its silver jubilee this year.

It is difficult to-day to conjure up the condition of the infant Indian cinema in 1913. The first Indian film was *Harishchandra*, based on the popular legend of Hindu mythology. The producers, Hindustan Film Co., of Nasik, were amply rewarded for their enterprise and the picture was successfully shown all over the country. A few production units sprung up at Calcutta and Madras and the pioneering producers were kept busy to cope with the increasing demand for Indian films. There were, of course,

no studios worth the name, most of the shooting being done in bungalow compounds, and it was not until 1920 that artificial lighting was used. The actors were largely borrowed from the stage while only common singing girls were available to act the feminine roles. The stage technique, indeed, permeated the whole process of film production and the Indian stage itself was at that time in a degenerate state, providing cheap entertainment to the mass of illiterate people by producing crude versified plays.

Following the success of the Hindustan Film Co., more and more financiers were induced to invest their capital in this business which even in those days of post-war boom could yield better and quicker profits. By 1919 the Madan Theatres of Calcutta had started production of films. Originally they were the owners of cinema houses and producers of conventional stage plays, and this experience proved to be a distinct advantage to them. Their very first picture was a great success. It is interesting to note that the leading feminine role in this film was played by an Italian actress. With the conservative communities still regarding film work with suspicion, it was difficult until





*The President*

very recently to secure the services of intelligent and presentable educated young women. The Madans hit upon the idea of employing Anglo-Indian girls, many of whom proved successful and popular stars.

#### THE END OF AN ERA

The year 1920 may be put down as marking the end of what may be termed the exclusively "mythological era" of the Indian screen. By now hardly any episode from *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* was left which had not been filmed and, indeed, some of the more popular legends had been produced over and over again. While to-day when there is a cry for sophisticated and modern pictures one is liable to regard mythological films with disfavour, one cannot deny that they did serve a useful purpose by establishing the screen as a popular medium of entertainment, thus laying the foundations for the latter-day progress and prosperity of the Indian film industry. The vast mass of conservative Indians would not have taken to the innovation of the cinema had they not been attracted to it by their age-old interest in mythological lore. There is a limit, however, to the stock of story material in mythology, and when a number of new producing concerns came into being in 1919 and 1920 they were faced with a shortage of potential scenarios. They wanted something different from, but as popular as, mythology. Thus started a cycle of Rajput pictures which sought to win public favour by spicing tales of martial heroism and chivalry with the stunts and thrills of Wild West films.

Rajput history and legends were ransacked for suitable material and when even this was exhausted, resourceful producers started adapting American adventure films into Indian atmosphere and so was born the pure stunt film. To appeal to the popular imagination such films were packed full with the most amazing exploits and adventures, impossible acts of heroism and superhuman feats of athletics. This was the time when the "hero" fought an army of men single handed, brandished a tin sword and always arrived on a galloping horse just in time to save the heroine from the clutches of the evil-looking villain.

#### THE "STUNT" FILM

Successively popular were several variations of the stunt film, Douglas Fairbanks's *Thief of Baghdad* starting a series of similar action pictures in India. The next important step was the detective thriller which, for the first time, brought the modern atmosphere on the screen. These were known as "social" films, to distinguish them from the historical and the mythological films. It is difficult now to trace the origin of this term but, in the parlance of the Indian film industry, "social" is still used to describe a film in which the atmosphere, settings and costumes are modern.

While the evolution of the "social" film was taking place, the cine technique, too, was making steady progress in India. Better and more cinema houses were built and there was a general demand for films of a superior quality. While it was no doubt true that producers were motivated by the desire for quick returns and minimum investment, there was a distinct improvement noticeable in the equipment of the studios as well as their products.

#### AN IMPORTANT LANDMARK

The year 1925 will remain an important landmark in the history of the Indian cinema, as it was in that year that an Indian film was released in the international market. *The Light of Asia*, based on the life of Gautama Buddha was produced by the Great Eastern Film Corporation of Lahore in collaboration with a German concern, the Emelka Film Co. The film was a tremendous success in England and on the Continent, and was followed by *The Loves of a Moghul Prince* based on the historical romance of Emperor Jehangir and Anarkali. Both these films were of a high technical standard and, to a great extent, helped to raise the general level of cinema technique in India.

#### PROGRESS IN BENGAL

Meanwhile, film production was making a headway in Bengal, too. Several new studios were started and some of



Shanta Apte in *Gopalkrishna*

Prabhat



them made a bold attempt to give something new to the film-goers who were by now fairly sick with the profusion of mythological and stunt pictures. Themes touching upon the real social problems of Bengal came to be in demand and, though their appeal was limited to the province, they served a most useful purpose by introducing vital and realistic stories and using the cinema in the cause of social reform. The production of some stories of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore further helped to raise the cultural level of the cinema in Bengal. Film production found a fertile field in this province as it had already established traditions of dramatic art. Very soon educated Bengalis started taking to this line, efficient technicians were trained and the nascent Bengali stage contributed a large quota of competent film artistes. Henceforward the leadership of the film industry definitely passed from Bombay to Calcutta.

#### ENTER THE TALKIES

Such was the state of affairs when the era of the talkies started in India. After a few experimental "shorts" had been made, the first full-length Hindustani talkie, *Alam Ara*, a romantic film, was released by the Imperial Film Co. of Bombay. As a sheer novelty the picture proved to be a great hit and soon every other studio in the country had to go in for talkies. Madans of Calcutta were the next to exploit this field and produced a number of popular musicals. They were still staging plays and thus they found it easy to use the same materials in talkies. Other producers, too, combed the theatrical companies for artistes who could act and sing. Thus it was that the earliest Indian talkies inherited the high-flown language, the versified dialogue, the exaggerated gestures and the profusion of songs from the decadent Indian stage. But actually the talkies proved the salvation of the Indian cinema. The increased cost of production killed all mushroom studios which could not afford to go in for the expensive equipment necessary for talkie production. At the same time the big profits made by the earliest talkie hits induced bigger financiers to lend their support to the film industry. Larger and better-equipped studios came into being and distinct technical improvement was noticeable. During the silent days the actors and actresses were engaged for their athletic skill and looks respectively, irrespective of histrionic ability. With the advent of the talkies many of them had to go and there was a demand for educated and cultured artistes. The cinema theatres increased, the crowds at the box-offices swelled and the Indian film industry was now finally set upon the path of prosperity and progress.

Since the advent of the talkies the pace of progress has been quickened, thanks to the efforts and achievements of an increasing number of progressive producers some of whom may be briefly mentioned here.

#### A FEW COMPANIES

The Prabhat Film Co. of Poona, founded nine years ago by a band of enthusiastic technicians working on a co-operative basis, was the first well-organised attempt to produce pictures of quality. Even its earliest mythological films were marked with excellent technique and authentic atmosphere. Elaborate sets, spectacular scenes and impressive mass effects have been the special features of Prabhat productions. To them belongs the credit for

producing *Tukaram*, a film of extraordinary artistic excellence depicting the life of a popular saint, which established a world record by continuously running in Bombay for over two years and won a prize at the International Film Exhibition of Venice.

About the same time as Prabhat, was founded the New Theatres in Calcutta. Drawing upon the cultural resources of nascent Bengal and at the same time collecting an efficient and cosmopolitan staff from all over India, this studio has quickly gained a position of eminence with its series of good productions. They have to-day the largest number of established stars and the best directors, and their films are noted for artistic elegance.

The first Indian studio started on sound business lines as a limited liability concern is the Bombay Talkies, Ltd. With the assistance of some of the leading financiers and staffed with expert Indian and foreign technicians, some of whom had been responsible for *Karma*, the first Indian talkie to be produced in England, they could afford to set up the most perfectly equipped studio in India, and within three years, the Bombay Talkies pictures have already achieved an enviable reputation. Perfect technique is the outstanding feature of their productions and it is not wrong to say that in this respect they have helped to raise the general technical level of the Indian screen. Their excellent film of Harijan life, *Achhut Kanya*, was among the best Indian films produced in recent years.

There are about fifty other studios employing about 35,000 workers and producing 350 shorts and features a year. Some of them, it must be admitted, are still engaged in the production of "popular" stunt pictures, cheap comedies and crude mythologicals. But these are definitely on the decline even though now and then some of them may produce a picture which is a box-office success. Even the much-maligned "popular" taste shows a definite change for the better, and a comparative study of the recent box-office hits would reveal that quality pictures are steadily ousting the "quickies" from the market.

#### THE FUTURE

What of the future? While none need be pessimistic about it, keen students of Indian cinema are agreed that in the ultimate analysis further progress will be conditioned by the expansion of the present limited market available for the Indian films. There are only about a thousand cinema theatres in the whole of India while a country with a much smaller population like Great Britain has about five thousand! Moreover, while the British and the American productions have a world-wide market, Indian talkies have perforce to depend only on these thousand cinema houses. The profit on a film thus does not warrant expensive production and most of the producers naturally cannot afford to buy better stories, engage better artistes and technicians and to use the superior studio equipment necessary for really first-class productions. Pending a substantial increase in the number of cinemas in the country it might be profitable to explore the foreign market—especially the countries and the colonies with a substantial Indian population. But only the best Indian pictures have a chance of being popular abroad and it is advisable that there should be co-ordination between the efforts that are being made in this connection by some of the leading producers. Then alone will it be possible to place India on the screen map of the world.



## "THE SUPREMELY BEAUTIFUL ISLE"

*Following India, here are a few words about the Cinema in Ceylon by J. VIJAYA-TUNGA*

ABOUT THE delights of the Ceylonese, there is something impressionist. Also about their feasts and festivals, their entertainment making and entertainment seeking. Indeed, about the beauty of their natural scenery—in such strong contrast to India. The nuances are not there. In India it is filigree, filigree everywhere—from the markings on the snows of Darjeeling to the dust of the bazaars of Deccan.

The cinema, as I have understood it, is the vehicle of impressionism. So long as it does not concern itself with details which the stage alone can emphasise, its functions will not clash with those of the stage, and each will remain the vehicle for a different mode.

The possibilities of the cinema, and for the cinema in Ceylon, are immense. But no one has tried to gauge them; nor except for a couple of instances has there been any organised effort to exploit them, even commercially, let alone artistically.

We have had *The Song of Ceylon*, a fine achievement and a tribute to Ceylon, thanks to those responsible—Basil Wright, Grierson and Lionel Wendt—*Tea Leaves in the Wind*, yet to be seen, and a few "documentary films", used as a rule to advertise tea. But oh, how inadequate!

There is that beautiful island—aptly named by Ceylon's artist, Justin Pieris, the Supremely Beautiful Isle—a thousand times more picturesque than Aran, with all deference to Flaherty's film, a place where climate, means of transport and such considerations are no problem at all, and which above all, from the impressionist's point of view, is nearly unique for its scenes of light and shadow. Along its many delightful rivers, dotted on either side by villages, up its mountain paths, across miles of saffron-green rice-fields, or by the sea where the lace-like foam of the breakers are shadowed by the dark green foliage of coconut palms—anywhere, and everywhere throughout Ceylon, the cameraman can set up his camera and bring away pictures of unforgettable beauty and quality.

And there are the temple festival scenes. Not the procession of elephants at the Temple of the Holy Tooth at Kandy—for in pageantry and colour the Indians excel the Ceylonese—but the gay scenes, at noon on the *Poya* day, when women and girls, grandfathers and grandsons, dressed in white, offer the pale saffron-coloured flowers of the coconut palm before the outdoor statues of the Buddha.

In everyday life, the Sinhalese and Tamils and "Moors" present a stimulating colour scheme. They dress in red, yellow and ochre check-striped *sarongs* and *cambayas* or *saris*. And whether they are clad in white cotton upper garments, or bare-bodied, those colours, against their brown and black skins, tone harmoniously with the landscape. How many pounds saved in the matter of wardrobes! That is, of course, if the picture producer avoids those sophisticated town-folk in their semi-European garb. What dignity or beauty can there be in an Oriental dressed in top-hat and tails or organdie and high heels.

No. A few miles away from the shops and sophistication of Colombo, the cinema enthusiast will come across both the ideal scenery and the ideal actors and actresses. I believe

it was Mr. Montague Marks who, on his brief visit to Ceylon, remarked that the Ceylon native was a born actor. This is a fitting compliment. Whether it is a loin-clothed man poling his low-roofed barge along the Kelani river, or a *mahout* taking his elephant to bathe at Katugastota, or a nimble-footed man climbing the *Kitul Palm*, the clay-pot and the knife fixed to his belt, or a group of women at the well, one and all, they are there admirably posed.

The actors and actresses are there; and the scenery is already provided. What is lacking? The brains (which means vision as well), the good taste, the technical skill and the money. It would be invidious for me to say which should come from where. But I cannot resist pointing out that both good taste and technical skill will have to be imported. The bad taste there is—and it is evident on all sides from architecture, house-furnishings to dress and educational ideals; it has been imported. And on the same principle that we observe that one devil must be cast out by another, but stronger, I say that good taste, to begin with, must be imported good taste.

Though I deplored, at the outset, the absence of any active signs of the intelligent appreciation of the possibilities of the cinema. I would rather that these were delayed than precipitated higgledy-piggledy. Movie-making has become rampant in India, as it has in Burma. Every day some new company makes its appearance. True enough they translate Indian themes and stories into celluloid, but the artistic atmosphere or aim seems to be entirely lacking from the Indian producer's mind. On the subject of political independence, Gandhi said some years ago that he was not enthusiastic about the white man's rule being just replaced by the brown man's rule. The replacement of ideals and values, is what he has striven for. Similarly national enterprise in movie-making might save some money for India, but how much more expensive in the long run it will be to eradicate the public predilection for bad and mediocre standards. Ceylon has not yet launched its cinema industry. But it will, before long. For we, too, have our little capitalists. One can only pray that a man or two with vision and artistic ability will stray into the councils of those capitalists.

Now what of the existing public taste in films? As elsewhere—from Rarotonga to Rhode Island—Ceylon was educated in the cinema on the Wild Westerns. Hoot Gibson, Pearl White, Reels Five, Six and Seven will-be-shown-tomorrow stuff. And any struggling cinema owner wanting to change his pitch from the dime movies of Second Avenue, New York, can be safely recommended to try Ceylon. Despite the flickers and blurs of age, the Wild Westerns were an escape to the natives of Ceylon as much as to those of Cyprus.

Later, when the more expensive elaborations of Douglas Fairbanks became the vogue, they voted for them with equal enthusiasm. For movement, and the three essentials of hero, villain and heroine were there. But the current abominations showing the emotional *ennui* of people with too much money, or the boy meets girl in the broadcasting



station or the newspaper office—these repetitive themes so outside the experience of nine-tenths of mankind—these bore Orientals to tears.

Also adenoids being chiefly an American commodity, Mae West's higher innuendoes fall flat on Oriental ears. To them Donald Duck's justly irascible quacking is more preferable. Sound synchronisation appeals to the Oriental mind as a novelty; but a picture is not popular with an Oriental public like that of Ceylon, just because it is a talkie. Charlie Chaplin has always reigned supreme in the Oriental heart, and any picture of his gets the wildest appreciation. *Modern Times* expresses to the Oriental mind the acme of cinema entertainment plus propaganda, outside the Wild Western theme.

In humour we gravitate to the Latin temperament. We laugh when a man (if he is pompous and fat and well-fed, and wears a gold chain) slips on a banana peel. Who wouldn't?

We laugh if a fat man—even if he is not rich, but just fat—is chased by an irate bull, its horns close to the buttocks of the pursued. Madrid under bombardment regaled its soldiers with Laurel and Hardy. And in peace time in Ceylon they rouse the un-English-educated Tamils and Sinhalese and Moors to heights of hilarity. An attempt at the revival of custard-pie throwing—of the old Max Linder and Mack Sennet days—may be made, if for Oriental consumption at least.

There we are then, naïve and easily pleased, ready to be entertained and thrilled like any average cinema audience in the world. But as I said before, our more delightful traits do not preclude us from being educated, uplifted and inspired. Not only things of beauty then, but things of truth—the marvels of science, nature unseen by the naked eye—these are the things that the cinema can give to Ceylon.

## LAZARE MEERSON

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*An appreciation of a man who was responsible for the sets of many of the most famous films of our time*

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LAZARE MEERSON died a few weeks ago in a London nursing home. In the nature of things, his funeral was not the sort of occasion which excites much notice. Among the mourners, however, were René Clair and Jacques Feyder. Who then was Meerson?

He was the art director of many brilliant Continental films and had worked with each of these eminent directors in their most successful films. At the time of his death, he was with Korda.

The work of an art director, however distinguished, does not receive sufficient public recognition in the present state of cinema, so it is right that the passing of Meerson should be marked with some tribute to his talents.

Meerson was a Russian Jew who came to Paris during that period, the four or five years following the War, which enriched the Western capitals with many personalities who arrived as refugees and remained to distinguish themselves in various branches of art.

Meerson himself was originally a painter. Turning his attention to cinema, he found himself in association with Clair, and in fact did the sets of Clair's silent successes, *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, *La Proie du Vent*, *Les Deux Timides*, and others. With Feyder, he did *Les Nouveaux Messieurs*, about this time.

He worked with Clair on the sound films which brought that director international renown—*Sous les Toits de Paris*, *Le Million*, *à Nous la Liberté*, *Quatorze Juillet*.

You may remember particularly the sets in Feyder's *La Kermesse Héroïque*. No inconsiderable part of the success of that extremely popular film was due, one may say, to the solidity and the authentic feeling supplied by Meerson as art director.

As an art director, Meerson not only had great resources of imagination and inspiration, but he was also accurate and conscientious, sparing himself no pains and seeing that all the work was properly done in accordance with his own high standards. This personal supervision of all details of the work is one of the great secrets of success in art direction.

In illustration I may mention that the last time I saw

him was in Charing Cross Station, a year or so ago. He was working at Korda's *Knight Without Armour*, and there he was, taking measurements and making sketches for the construction of a Russian railway station at Denham. I thought it characteristic of him that he would delegate this work to nobody else.

Returning for the moment to *La Kermesse Héroïque*, let me recall for you how Meerson by his architectural skill and by the clever use of water, trees and natural objects built up a feeling of authenticity and made it easy for us to imagine that we had actually been transported back through the centuries.

It is quite remarkable that a man trained originally as a painter should have caught so readily the architectural solution of so many problems of set-designing. I think the reason for this success of Meerson's lies in the fact that he was a Jew, for I have noticed that Jews are very often versatile, adaptable people, with great facility in turning their natural talent in various directions.

An art director, nevertheless, must do as the film-director wishes. When he made *Sous les Toits* with Clair, Meerson came in for a great deal of criticism. The story of this film is very interesting, and, at this time of day, quite amusing.

*Sous les Toits*, you may remember, was not at first successful in France. But it had great successes in other countries, and when it had won international praise, it went very well in France.

To understand why it did not take very well at first, you must remember that at that time, and for some years previously, the French directors had been using real exteriors. Now Clair comes along and gives the people of Paris a film about their own city, in which the exteriors are all studio built.

Knowing Meerson, I do not think he was the one who was responsible for Clair's decision to make the film in the studio. I think that it was Feyder's influence that caused Clair to tackle the film in this way.

Not long before, Feyder had made in Berlin a film version





Original designs by Lazare Meerson for *Fire over England*

of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. In accordance with the long established German practice, he used studio exteriors. Clair seems to have taken his cue from Feyder, and *Sous les Toits* was the first important film made with studio exteriors by a French director working in France.

Strangely enough, I think the film succeeded abroad for the very reason that made it hang fire in France. Being a foreigner, Meerson, I fully believe, was able to construct a vision of Paris which corresponded much more closely with the foreigner's vision of Paris than Paris herself would.

Anyway the film had great qualities of charm in its own right, and was very well received, and in due course had its success in France, because the French people naturally went to see the film that the foreigners had made such a fuss over.

And after *Sous les Toits*, as we all know, the French cinemas went back to the practice of using real exteriors.

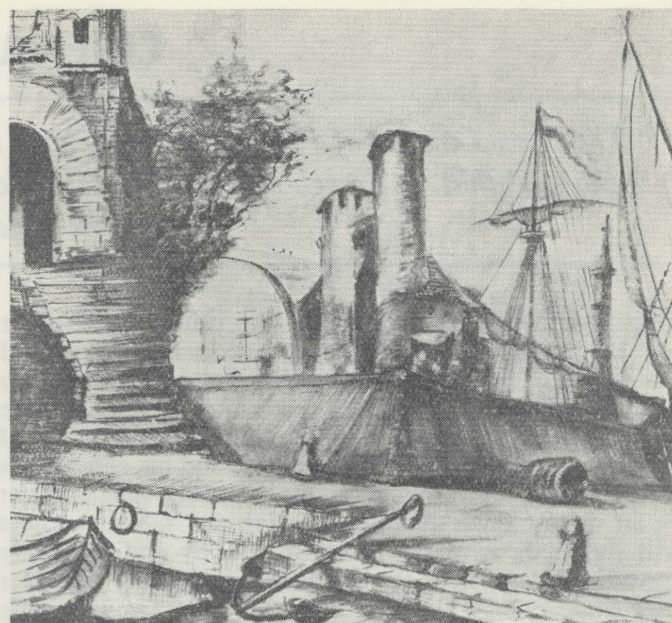
Meerson's part in the making of *Sous les Toits*, working closely with Clair and assisting him at all points in the realisation of the whimsical ideas which gave the film its originality, illustrates that team-spirit in him which made him such an invaluable collaborator.

Even if one knew nothing of Meerson, one could deduce the presence of a peculiarly gifted and adaptable art director merely by considering Clair's films. Such originality could not have found expression at all without somebody of Meerson's calibre to consult, experiment, refer back, try, fail and start again. Such a worker is indispensable; in fact worth his weight in gold, though he may get little credit from the general public.

A film director must have good collaborators. Of all forms of art entertainment, film depends perhaps most upon team-work.

I myself can speak of Meerson's qualities as a team-mate, for he really started his film career as assistant to me when I was art-director on the L'Herbier film, *Feu Mathias Pascal*, from the story by Pirandello.

I know that during his long association with Clair, Meerson was constantly together with him. Every night, Clair and Meerson, Clair's assistant, Valentin, and the cameraman, Georges Perinal, met and spent the evening



playing "belotte." In the friendly atmosphere generated by this very proletarian card game, the various problems of production were discussed and discussed again.

Meerson worked best in this atmosphere. He must have suffered, and his work must have suffered, by his transplantation to England a year or two ago.

For as you know, he came to England to do *As You Like It* for Czinner, and remained to work with Korda on such films as *Knight Without Armour* and *Fire Over England*. He was lent by Korda to Buchanan for *Break the News*. He was lent again to M.G.M. for the King Vidor film which is at present in production.

For Korda's *The Divorce of Lady X*, Meerson had the opportunity of using colour. His work in this film was very highly praised both here and in America.

The Hollywood methods of production which are in vogue at Denham never appealed to Meerson. He always wanted to get back to his former associates. At the time of his death he was planning to join Clair in the independent production of a new colour film.

When Meerson left the Tobis Studios at Epinay to come to England, his departure was deeply felt—as deeply as when he left his first surroundings, the Albatros studios at Montreuil, where most of his associates were refugees like himself.

This fact is not without significance, for the French people, unlike the English, do not accept foreigners readily. The sincere friendships which Meerson left behind him in France clearly indicate that in addition to the professional skill and the high artistic conscience which I have mentioned, Meerson had personal qualities which were no less admirable.

As you may have been able to read between the lines of this article, Meerson was the kind of man who makes a good friend, loyal to his colleagues and faithful to his assistants.

He was quiet, even taciturn; dependable, brilliant when brilliance was required, but having none of the instability which so often goes with brilliance.

In the world of cinema, such qualities are not always found in one man. It is safe to say that in Meerson the Denham lot loses one of its best members.



## CINÉ—ACTUALITÉ

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*The News Cinemas of France are facing hard times according to this article by FELIX ROSE, who adds that "a French March of Time would be an excellent thing but under present conditions it could not pay"*

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DURING THE last two centuries the printed newspaper has established itself as a prime necessity of civilised intercourse. Through the newspaper man has evolved into a voracious type of animal that needs must be fed upon the (printed) founts of life. But its supremacy for carrying and disseminating the news to man at large and his wife now is seriously challenged by the cinema. And the time may not be far distant when the roving, seeing and talking camera will supersede it as *the* means of quickly and efficiently spreading everywhere the good or bad tidings, wherever they come from. To-day in almost all countries a growing interest is evinced already for that newest form of screen information and screen entertainment. The silent picture has made way for the talking voice on the screen. Incidentally there is no doubt that the newsreel more than anything else in the cinema has benefited from the new invention at being imparted with that forceful living expression and a realistic background. Better still, radio and its twin-sister, television, soon will bring to us in a flash the NEWS that events nurture, the NEWS as they happen and as they are. It may yet come to pass that the newsreels as they are shown on public and private screens will shape new destinies for the millions.

### THE FIRST NEWSREELS AND AFTER

One can still remember the poor stuff (judged by to-day's standard) that newsreels were in days gone by and the poor showing they had in the cinemas. Even though care and money were spent to produce them, they were then rented for next to nothing. Many an exhibitor did not want them because his patrons spurned them and also because they meant for him a loss to gain in so far as they shortened the space allocated to showing advertising matter on the screen. Often it needed quite a lot of coaxing to force the newsreel upon the exhibitor, who took to looking upon it as a kind of none too good "filling-up" that should be thrown into the bargain. Newsreels then always started the programme as a "curtain-raiser". What did it matter if it was screened before empty chairs? On the contrary the exhibitor for one was quite satisfied because the cinemagoers thus were excused for taking it easy at and after their meal and coming in late, though in good time to see the beginning of the first short or the first feature. Of course, everybody knows that dinner-time is sacrosanct in France and *la fine* cannot be missed but should be sipped contentedly.

However, with technical and other improvements in cinema-theatres and the progressive building-up of a more discriminating cinema-minded public, newsreels began to come into their own. French pioneer-firms like Pathé and Eclair, that have been producing and distributing newsreels in France ever since 1908, and after them Paramount and Fox, strove to give the French cinemagoers the best NEWS quickly and efficiently. News-cameramen

became specialists, and several new firms ventured to devote themselves exclusively to the newsreel business. The advent of sound in 1929 gave to the newsreels a new interest and a new impetus. Almost overnight they got the star-part in the cinemas and got there anyway the biggest hand. Sometimes they were billed outside in larger and heavier type than the superproduction. The public came in ever increasing numbers to see and to hear them, to applaud them, to discuss them for days afterwards. The newsreels at last had conquered.

### THE FIRST NEWS-CINEMA IN THE WORLD

It is a matter of common knowledge that the father of all cinemas was opened by the French inventor, Louis Lumière, on the Boulevard St. Denis in Paris in 1892; there he regularly gave performances of his first moving pictures such as the French railways steaming into the La Cistat Station, etc. It should be noted that this cinema was taken over by Pathé frères and opened by them as a news-cinema as late as 1912—probably the first news-cinema in the world. The famous Pathé Journal made the bulk of its programme and continued to do so all through the war and many subsequent crises. Until January, 1938, its exploitation as a news-cinema remained unaltered under the successive management of Charles Pathé's secretary and of M. Thiriot, the private owner who is still running it to-day. Displays of enlarged news-photographs and handwritten news as telephoned or given by the tape are still attracting passers-by into the lobby, thence into the hall. Unfortunately and much against its present owner's ideas, owing to present-day difficulties and the competition prevailing in the district (there are no less than twelve regular cinemas in the immediate neighbourhood and one or two of them have gone so far as to bill *three* great films in a single programme), the showing of one feature film has been deemed also necessary to retain a fast dwindling patronage. But two different newsreels are to be seen in each programme so that the Pathé Journal Cinema, as it is called, can still be numbered among the news-cinemas exploited to-day in Paris.

### THE NEWS-CINEMAS THAT USED TO BE

Whereas in 1933 Paris alone could boast of some ten news-cinemas, and the idea was spreading fast to the provinces, four or five only remain in the capital to-day. The others, meanwhile, have changed their policy, and to survive are being run on the usual lines, that is to say, in a complete programme comprising a great film, a short and a cartoon; the news is the shortest item. The fact that the programme is continuous and that their one-price of admission is lower than the average price of a seat in the cinemas on the boulevards or in the districts showing a double-feature bill, ensures a fairly good patronage. But one hears complaints in the trade about the general





Claimed to be the first News Cinema in the world: the Pathé-Journal Cinema as it was in 1912

lowering of prices in the cinemas during the past few years. We will come back to that later.

From 1930 onwards there was a general enthusiasm for and a great spur of activity from the newsreels. It was then felt that they had a future full of promises, that they were more significant, more real and inspiring than the made-up 100 per cent (and sometimes more) talking-film, that the latter and the art of the cinema generally should look to the sound-news if they were to evolve into a genuine thing of beauty. The writer may be allowed to recall here that in the first week of May, 1931, he was even so bold as to publish and edit the first weekly newspaper ever issued that was exclusively devoted to news-filming and newsreels. Its title was *Ciné-Actualités*. Alas, its publication was rather premature and it could last but a few months! To come back to the news-cinemas, with the Pathé Journal Cinema already established as a model in Paris and the instantaneous success that rewarded the opening in 1930 of similar cinemas in New York and London, a decisive move was made in France. The late Mr. Reginald Ford, an Englishman who had made France

his home, in 1931 founded the first company to build and to exploit a chain of such cinemas. He was a man of vision and a great organiser, and under his impulsion his company, Cineac, opened thirteen news-cinemas in the first four years in France, Belgium and Holland. To-day Cineac owns and controls twenty-three cinemas, thirteen of which are in France (seven in Paris, six in the provinces). Three Cineac cinemas in Paris can still claim to be news-cinemas; they are at the Saint-Lazare Station, at the Gare Montparnasse and on the Boulevard des Italiens. To these can be added the Nord-Actua cinema that Biscot, the popular French artist, opened at the Gare du Nord, and for the sake of the good old times the Pathé Journal Cinema referred to above. In all, five news-cinemas only in Paris, notwithstanding the fact that twenty-five are placed under the patronage of one or the other of the great French newspapers and would have one believe that their chief concern is NEWS. But titles are often deceptive. The Cineac cinemas in Marseille (2), Lilly, Nice, Toulouse, Strasbourg remain also news-cinemas.



#### FACTS, NEWS & COMMENTS ON THE NEWS-CINEMA IN FRANCE

There remain only four or five news-cinemas in Paris because:

(a) Purses are being tightened in France. The cinema has ceased to be a necessity for the toiling millions; it has become rather a luxury for the few. To tempt its prospective customers, prices have been lowered while at the same time the programmes have been lengthened. The news-cinema cannot fill its seats, even at frs. 3.50 apiece (4½d.) except from among a leisurely or passing crowd.

(b) Newsreels are not yet what they should be, what they may still become one day: as vivid and illuminating a piece of news as the best newsprint can be sometimes, and how much more convincing. News-filming only too often falls into a routine job. Newsreels repeat one another; they sometimes use old cuts, old scenes to make up their set mileage; they somehow do not seem to convey to the spectator the intense reality of the news (when the news does matter to him) and much less its meaning. A French *March of Time* would be an excellent thing, but under present conditions it could not pay. As it is, newsfilms have lost their hold on the French cinemagoer.

(c) There is not a sufficient supply of "shorts" in France and it is an almost impossible task to ensure week after week a complete programme including them in a news-cinema. This is due to the fact that the two-feature bill is generally adopted in the cinemas in France; consequently, complete programmes are booked months ahead and are supplied by the renter to the French exhibitor; there is no room for "shorts" and producers will not make them until there is a change in the exhibiting side in the industry.

(d) A recent so-called Parisian event (a duel between a famous French playwright and the administrator of the Comédie Française) has brought home the point that news-filming is not yet free in France in the same sense as news-printing is free. According to a Bill voted in the French Chambers in May, 1936, newsreels can be publicly shown without an official certificate. On the face of it, this is a progress; unofficial censorship, however, keeps a watchful eye on newsreels advising here and there what to film and what not to film. Moreover, a special article in the Bill provides for an emergency censorship should the opportunity arise, and the consequent interdiction of the censored newsreel. Thus it happened with this Parisian duel, because duelling is illegal in France. Well, fettered news-filming does not make for enlightened newsreels nor enlightened newsreel-fans.

#### NEWS-CINEMAS AS THEY ARE IN PARIS

Their programme lasts between one hour and one-and-a-half hours; it comprises as a rule two newsreels, a travelogue, a short film with music or a colour film, an educational film and a cartoon. Their total length is 2000 metres on an average. The price of admission varies between 3 and 4 francs (4d. and 5d.). They open from 10 a.m. till about midnight. Insistent sitters who would see the same programme two or three times over again are politely reminded sometimes by a well-styled attendant to relinquish their seats. Sub-standard (16mm.) film can also be screened, and on special occasions the management of the cinemas will have its own cameramen to film the news and showing it on the same day in its cinemas. (There is no censorship whatever applying to sub-standard film in France.) One year ago, a Cineac cinema boosted a special performance of films having the third dimension. This was obtained

with "anaglyphes" system invented by Louis Lumière and necessitating special glasses that were hired at the cinema for three francs. This was not quite successful, although it opens new possibilities. There is no special apparatus installed in news-cinemas for the use of deaf people (possibly a case of "safety first"). No provision has yet been made to making use of television and televised programmes in the news-cinemas; this may change soon, however. Colour films are a regular feature; they chiefly are American-made with the Technicolor process, but the German-made Ondia-color seems to be forging ahead. A French firm using a French bi-pack process almost similar to the Ondia-color is preparing a number of colour films for the French market. They, like the British Dufay-colour and the Ondia-color, supplied to French Cinemas a colour film of the voyage of their Majesties The King and Queen of England in France on the morrow of their arrival in Paris. The Cineac news-cinemas are placed under the patronage of the French newspaper, *Le Journal*; this is a simple business arrangement whereby the cinema advertises the name of its patron and the newspaper gives a preferential treatment in its columns to advertisements of the cinema. The Cineac company in its contracts with newsreels has reserved for itself the right to cut and arrange the newsreels as it thinks fit.

#### SYNDICAT DE LA PRESSE FILMEE

This Syndicate has been formed by all the newsreel companies whether French or foreign established in France: Pathé Journal, France-Actualités-Gaumont, Eclair-Journal, Fox-Movietone, Paramount-Actualités, Paris-Actualités and Metrotone (the latter does not issue a newsreel in France though). Its President is M. Roger Weil-Lorach, who now also is in charge of the Pathé-Cinema concern. The Association aims at furthering the interests of the newsreel companies but also at improving the newsreels. To this effect, there is every Wednesday a reunion of all members in a projection room where the various newsreels are screened for the benefit of all the chief-editors present. Each can see what the other has been doing; tips are exchanged, criticisms may be heard, advice can be offered, new resolutions may be taken. Such a collective vision certainly has many points to recommend it to all and sundry in England and elsewhere.

To conclude this article, the production of newsreels in France nowadays is hampered by adverse trade and general conditions. The news-cinema, a great idea as it was, has also suffered thereby. There is no doubt, however, that the French public is fully alive to the possibilities that this form of entertainment offers him. Probably more than any other people, and for very good reasons, French people are painfully aware of the momentous times through which they are living, of all the changes that are going on in the world. They should like to know what is happening day by day in that world. Newspapers distort the news because they are made by and for biased people. Newsreels could interpret the news, and in any case they could show them as they are. Truth has in it an element that makes for sanity. News-cinemas will enable us one day, let us hope, to face up to that truth, however unpleasant it may be and from whichever quarter it may come. We may yet live to see the turn of the tide and the news-cinema firmly established in France as in all other countries as a collective information centre for the man-in-the-street as well as for the masses.



## OH ! LONDON

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*Provincial cinemagoers are more intelligent than the average Londoner according to HECTOR McCULLIE, who is well known in the film world as the manager of a large west-country cinema*

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IN MY ENCOUNTERS with all types of cinema patrons in the provinces I have been surprised at the enthusiasm which often permeates a cinema from the front row of the "sixpennies" to the back row of the "two-shillings" when a good "interest" or one of the many admirable British documentary shorts is flashed upon the screen. Cinema managers and cinema patrons have both combined to convince me (the former by their advertising of them and the latter by their applause) that the interest and documentary short is a valuable asset to the entertainment offered and purchased.

Many a time has it been my good fortune to visit a provincial cinema (not necessarily a luxurious super-cinema, but often an unpretentious five-hundred seater) and find that one of a well-known series of instructional shorts has not only been placed in an important programme position but has been received by the audience with rounds of applause.

I do not intend to shirk the issue, and will bluntly but fairly say that London falls far behind in this respect. Central London and suburban audiences are prone to regard the documentary and interest short rather as a programme filler (despite the fact that often the two feature films alone occupy over three hours programme time), and accept its presence with a mixture of resentment and resignation, seldom bringing to it a receptive mind such as is to be easily found in the provinces.

This difference is by no means confined to adult audiences but also applies to children and adolescents. I am aware that my experience is that of many sufficiently interested in this subject to experiment and learn therefrom. Children's performances in London and the suburbs are most successful when Western stories and thrilling serials are consistently included in the programmes, and I have observed the fidgety reaction of London children when they have been offered interesting and admirably produced films such as the *Private Life of the Gannetts*, *Turning her Round*, etc. Against this I have had the delightful experience of hearing the ringing cheers of provincial children at the final fade-out of films like *London Visitors* and other instructional films.

### A CYNIC IS NONPLUSSED

The cynic may explain this away by saying that youthful exuberance is not necessarily appreciation, but when, as has been the case, adult audiences have been found receiving two feature films in silence and reserving their applause for the interest short which has been placed in the programme by an astute management, the discrimination of the provincial adult is not so easily explained away.

This is neither the time nor the place for exploring the multifarious reasons for such a marked difference in the attitudes of the provincial and London cinema-goer, but there can be no harm in at least skirting the subject. Communal life in London and Greater London is in most cases of greater intensity and speed than provincial life, even in many of the largest provincial cities. This must have

its effect upon the mentality of the Londoner, as often at the end of the day's hub-bub of work and travel, he or she is in no mood for being asked to think very deeply on matters which the average Londoner considers to have been left behind in the schoolroom many years previously.

Again, even at the risk of bringing all London's good citizens down upon my head in wrathful indignation, can it be disputed that the average Londoner resents any attempt to educate or elevate him above his self-satisfied level? Unimbued with the sophistication of his London brother, the provincial lives nearer to Nature and the fundamentals of life, and is not so concerned with, and does not seek, the superficialities which surround the Londoner and are eagerly accepted as a narcotic or contrast to his hectic mode of living.

### LONDONERS ARE BUSY, BUT . . .

Psychologically, the provincial is at a distinct advantage compared with the Londoner, inasmuch as leisure available to him affords more time for meditation and the ability to appreciate life as it is and in its wider sense is not subjugated by the fierce and active daily round of work and long travel which confronts the London worker.

Education being the fundamental source of the ability or inability to appreciate and discriminate, can it be said that this much maligned social force is more effective in the provinces than in London? It would be a daring person that would make such a bold suggestion. How then is it that provincial children will enjoy interest and documentary films which London children have shown themselves to have little time for or appreciation? It is a disturbing problem which frankly I have no solution, even after many years of probing.

The important fact does, however, remain, that although provincial patrons welcome the interest and documentary film and regard it as a necessary part of a well-balanced entertainment and programme, the London audiences mostly view it as a "programme filler" whose presence is only due to the probability of the cinema proprietor considering it a cheap and economic time-filler. To the reader who would point out that the Central London news theatres are doing good work by extensive booking of good-class interest films, I will reply by asking if the small number of news theatres in Central London is in any way comparable to the numerous cinemas, super and otherwise, that are engaged in purveying entertainment to London's millions in Central and Greater London.

The documentary and interest film is rapidly coming into its own. The provinces needed no encouragement, but with the new Cinematograph Films Act, ensuring a wider exhibition of "shorts", London will have every opportunity of emulating the provincial appreciation of British documentary and interest films. It matters not that the London and Suburban patron will have to be subjected to forceful legislation for the purpose of encouraging appreciation; the means will be of little concern if the desired ends are achieved.



## A CLAY BLUE BEARD

*A new French puppet film described by* PATRICIA HUTCHINS

BEHIND THE latest experiment in puppet films lies a strange assortment of facts and personalities.

This colour version of Perrault's *Blue Beard*, produced by the scientist Painlevé and realised by the sculptor René Bertrand and his children, is not a puppet film in the Pal, Starevitch or "New Gulliver" tradition. In the use of a new plastic material to give a striking effect of three dimensional reality, its deviation from accepted methods and close study of natural movement, the film carries forward the work of many half forgotten enthusiasts who foresaw the future of satire and fantasy in the cinema.

Since it was first published, in a rather shame faced way, in the seventeenth century, the theme of Blue Beard and his murdered wives has known many vicissitudes. On the screen these have varied from the hand-coloured trick films of Méliès to the suave, divorce court sophistications across the water. This time Jean Painlevé has determined that its interpretation shall be as "far as possible from the spirit of American films" adding, significantly, "that it would be useless to compete in a genre where perfection has been achieved."

Charles Perrault is almost forgotten and his stories of Mother Goose absorbed into the texture of many languages. This genial, indomitable *littérateur*, who among other things kept the Tuileries Gardens open for ever in the interests of children, was described by Andrew Lang as "a born irregular, truant from school, deserter of the bar, an architect without professional training, a rebel against the tyranny of the classics and immortal by a kind of accident."

The fairy tales were written on retirement and appeared under his son's name. They are an unrivalled combination of traditional story-telling with the shrewd observation of of an old courtier, the candour and vivid imagery of a child's mind. The least supernatural, Blue Beard is in many ways a reflection of Perrault's own age. Its original text reveals an underlying satire on the *bourgeois* outlook of the time with its—not unfamiliar—preoccupation with gilded coaches and social precedence.

Music is of great, in fact, primary importance to M. Bertrand's film which is based on a form of *opera buffa*. This was specially written by Maurice Jaubert who considers this style more suited in many ways to the cinema than to the theatre. The words are by Jean-Vincent Brechignac and both music and film set out to guy the tragic manner.

Nearly two years ago I found my way to René Bertrand's studio in Montparnasse. As he talked I watched his three children modelling the figures which their small, skilful fingers would bring to life, movement by movement, before the camera. I stooped to examine the detail of a banquetting hall twelve inches high or stood before a trick table where medieval castle or crowded street scene was modelled entirely in plastiline.

A form of coloured clay, plastiline can only be worked at night during very warm weather and its effect of relief has given rise to many difficulties of lighting and perspective, to say nothing of the balance of colour and smooth transition from one gesture to another. In the case of panning shots alone it was necessary to use a studio in miniature with full lighting equipment to scale.

Whereas the usual method of cartoon or trick film is to substitute a different drawing or model for the phases of a movement or to suggest relative size, here the plastiline figure itself is changed, a process best described as *modelage sur place*. Work is very slow, often not more than twenty frames a day, and retakes of a particular incident impossible as no detailed record can be made.

As a reward the sculptor obtains results which are very different from the arbitrary movement of the cartoonist. René Bertrand has brought to this experiment his thorough knowledge of the analysis of movement, aided in particular by certain documents of de Marey's to obtain the greatest precision. It will be remembered that Dr. de Marey was one of the first Frenchmen to take an active interest in the film and in 1874 made a valuable study of human and animal movement.



"The Visit"



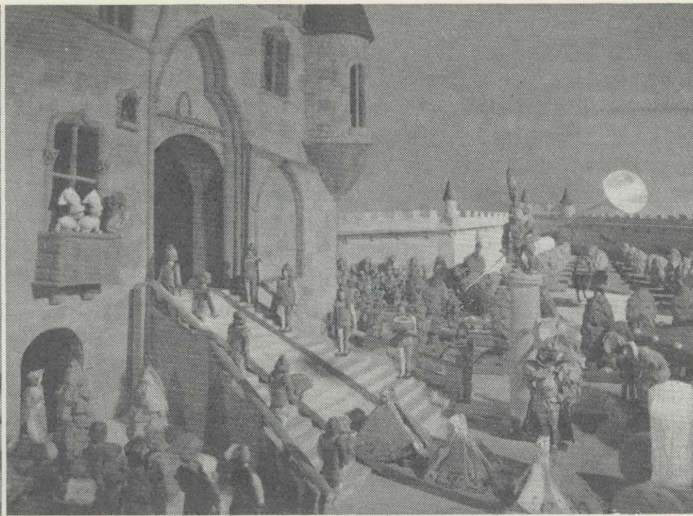
"The War"





*A Message from Blue Beard*

A special camera for *Blue Beard* was devised by Jean Painlevé with the technical adroitness which underlies his brilliant documentaries of underwater life and lengthy list of film research in biology and physics. Last autumn I was able to see several sequences from *Barbe Bleue*. These were of necessity disjointed and incomplete without the sound track, but they provided glimpses of a solid enough



*Wedding Presents Arrive*

world in which, unembarrassed, the characters of a fairy tale had their being. Where permissible, colour was used dramatically, but in certain scenes a subtlety and atmosphere was obtained impossible to the black and white films of Ptusko and Starevitch or the neater, modern bathroom charm of George Pal's work—also in Gasparcolor—with its wooden soldier rhythm and deliberate flouting of reality.

## WHY NOT A NATIONAL FILM SOCIETY?

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THOROLD DICKINSON, Director of the "High Command," "Spanish A.B.C." and other films, asks a pertinent question. And while doing so he has written an interesting article . . .

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ISN'T IT rather a striking fact that nearly all our best films are made to order? Everyone nowadays admits that the best British films are the documentaries, but few of them go on to consider that they do not include in that class the shorter films of a non-fictional character which are marketed through the ordinary commercial channels and are financed with no intent towards propaganda. What everyone calls the documentary film is the film that is directly sponsored by some Government department or big commercial group as an entertaining form of publicity, the costs of which are allocated under the heading of publicity or propaganda. These films fall into three groups:

The scientific, intended largely for instructional use either in schools or in training classes for the staffs of the sponsoring bodies themselves;

The direct publicity, for showing to non-theatrical audiences with no charge for admission, as a means towards public instruction;

The indirect publicity, which are entertaining enough in themselves to attract paying audiences in ordinary cinemas as well and in which ideas reach the audience through a filter of emotional appeal.

While this latter category theoretically stands in danger of encroaching on the field of the commercial short, it actually wins hands down, for the source of finance of the

indirect publicity film does not dry up if the film fails to get its money back, while the shadow of financial failure looms over the production of commercial shorts like a nightmare, and the margin between profit and loss is so narrow that quality in production must always be sacrificed for the sake of an honest endeavour to ensure an adequate financial return.

The current practice on the part of the distributors of "throwing in" a short with the big pictures without necessarily charging a separate fee for its hire represents the general attitude of *weight* rather than *quality* that commercial circles adopt towards the short film. The only way to break through this situation is to make a series of films entertaining enough under a general heading to create a demand for a steady supply—*The March of Time* and the various series of cartoons for example. You will note that none of these examples are local products. Almost the only local products in series besides newsreels have been magazine films financed by producers with large exhibitor interests.

The new quota for shorts creates the possibility of an opening for local short production. The commercial film world, however, appears to be disinclined to take advantage of that opportunity and, as usual, has decided merely to keep within the law. As the law provides no minimum cost



for shorts to fulfil the quota, and as the separate booking of shorts is rapidly falling out of practice, as mentioned above, distributors are beginning to fulfil the tax on their import of foreign shorts by buying outright the minimum footage required by law for as little as £140 per reel. Since it is heartbreaking to try to put quality into shorts with the best and most economical organising for less than £250 per reel, the act seems to have condemned British audiences for ten years to fidget through the projection of films of famous streets, collections of paintings and other works of art, anything in fact that takes the minimum of time and trouble to photograph. And the sound track will be occupied by a running commentary spoken over a scrappy gabbling of tea-time melodies.

The detached onlooker, unconnected with film production either by ties of finance, family relationship or personal friendship, must find this state of affairs superbly comic. He would reason that the exhibitor might prefer to show even the most instructional sponsored documentary, not offered for quota, in place of the shoddy quota short. But then the exhibitor would be breaking the law. Should the exhibitor be prepared to pay extra for good quota shorts, obviously made at more than cut rate prices? That would be a risk to which the exhibitor's financial resources might object. After all he has the same number of seats to fill as before, and it is the star in the big picture who brings the public into the theatre. His need for additional shorts, besides his newsreel and cartoon, depends on the length of his long films. Often he has no need for further shorts, and if he contracts for a further series, even once a month for example, it means that one booking of long films each month has to be of shorter footage than usual in order to cram his programme into an economic length of time.

It amounts to this, then, that only some concerted action on the part of all exhibitors would change the present policy regarding the distribution of commercial shorts. The normal attitude of exhibitors to sponsored shorts is that the exhibitor should pay nothing (or even be subsidised) for showing direct publicity and should pay less than the usual commercial rates for indirect publicity. If sponsored films were offered for quota, the same arguments would be brought to bear, and by the distributors also.

Good films are the cream of a steady run of production. Spasmodic production brings spasmodic cream. No one can produce films consistently at uneconomic rates, when this means that only the freaks among his product can make a profit: that was the lesson of the last slump. The present state of affairs in shorts may lead to a repetition of the experiences of long film production (without minimum cost for quota) under the last Act. Backer after backer will make the attempt, lose his money and retire from the contest. Each newcomer will glamourously feel that he holds the secret of success, bolstered up by promoters who persuasively "explain" how they came to fail before in the face of circumstances, beyond their control, which will not recur. Occasional successes, often equally due to circumstances beyond their control bringing inconsequent publicity, will bolster the unhealthy stream of production.

How to avoid a situation amounting to anarchy? The advocates of the present system—the struggle for the survival of the fittest—claim that the life-blood of progress is competition. If shorts were not made competitively, there would be no advance, only a decline. But we have just shown that decline under the present Act is inevitable.

What you need, you may then say, is competition plus protection. That, we reply, we have also, and still the British commercial short will decline. Would you add a minimum cost clause? Certainly that would help by taxing further the import of shorts from abroad. And that tax would automatically be passed on to the exhibitor, who would be charged more for his quota footage than for his foreign. If the result made his audiences less restive, the longer-sighted exhibitors might more willingly foot the bill, but the average exhibitor would bitterly resent the additional expense.

Is our detached onlooker still laughing? Probably the joke has gone on long enough: the subject is growing rather tiresome, technical and in any case insoluble as regards satisfaction to all parties concerned. If you give the producer more chances, the exhibitor feels the pinch. And the distributor is far more interested in his imports, which with their wider markets are far more profitable to him and which in most cases are made by the headquarters of his own concern and so have more personal interest to him. Taxes in any case are irksome and unsympathetic by nature, and making a product a tax at once rouses antipathy on the taxee's part against that product. Moreover, everyone agrees that British films are usually dull, and the good British films are handicapped by the existence of this widespread prejudice. Following this vicious circle around with his mind's eye is making our detached onlooker's mind dizzy.

Let us for our comfort's sake take another look at the sponsored films. After all, however detached our onlooking, none of us have to apologise for them. *Why not?*

Fundamentally because their production is based on confidence on the part of the sponsor and security in the minds of the craftsmen responsible for them, these films are not made with the sole object of bringing a profit to the backer. That does not mean that they need not pay their way. But that is not the direct and only intention behind their manufacture. Their main purpose is to impart given ideas to the spectator in order to persuade the spectator of the value of the existence of those ideas. The spectator's reaction to them is the measure of their success as is the case of the purely entertaining film. But it need not necessarily be a directly financial reaction, nor does it need the stimulus to the sponsor of a financial profit to induce its repetition.

Competition, therefore, exists in sponsored production, not in the form of a struggle for financial prizes, but for renown. If the maker wants to appeal to the articulate, the sophisticated or the intelligent, he can only do so economically by recognising the numerical limitations of those audiences. If he wants his films to appeal more widely, he can spend more money without fear of loss and make his films more simply with more emotional appeal (and they will be none the worse for that). His employees will gladly take a living wage, gauged to the value of their services and to the security which steady employment offers them. For his sponsors will only have embarked on this enterprise, after first exploring the scope of their distribution and the nature of their audiences. Expansion and contraction can then be allowed for as it occurs. Bureaucracy on the part of producers and craftsmen will lead to ineffective products effecting contraction of audiences.

**Competition for positions in the industry will keep a flow of keenness and expertness to counteract this tendency. It already does so in our**



**documentary field, and we do not have to remind ourselves that these are the only British films for which we do not constantly have to apologise.**

The subjects chosen depend on consultation between the sponsors and their producers and craftsmen. The initial suggestions come from the sponsors and are translated into film equivalents by their employees.

Now, permit yourself to regard the prospect of the sponsor being the nation itself, either in whole or in part.

## II

Before you go back over the last paragraphs to see if I have been cheating, I would emphasise one point: the purpose of this article is not to advocate the nationalising of the film trade and industry in this country. That would necessitate an upheaval beyond the scope of this article, even if the trade and industry were British. Now that they are Americo-British, a move of this kind would throw transatlantic diplomatic and commercial relations into a complete dither.

An increasing proportion of the public in most civilised countries is learning to shop for their film entertainment. I am merely suggesting that they carry their shopping to its logical conclusion: that they begin to order and pay for their goods in advance. The politically-conscious workers of France, or rather some million and a half of them, subscribed two francs each, and so bought their tickets in advance, for the production of *La Marseillaise*, a film that was to express dramatically their political convictions. Here in Great Britain members of film societies buy in advance the right to see programmes of films not otherwise available without the least idea of what they are letting themselves in for. Members of each of the numerous book clubs back in advance the taste of a small selection committee, because they trust the expertness of the opinions so assembled.

**Is it inconceivable that a league of film audiences might be founded by a process of trial and error, in which every member would have a say in the choice of subjects to be produced or otherwise acquired for showing to the extent of the amount of their advance subscription?**

Imagine the possibility of approximately one-half per cent of this nation of ours agreeing that it would be refreshing to see once a year a programme of films representing the various group tastes of those half-million people. If each member put up a shilling for the production costs (and a small additional sum when the films were shown to cover exhibition charges in the appropriate local hall), £25,000 would be available in advance for the production of some ten or more reels of film.

A tenth of the members might be interested in politics to the extent that they might persuade the league to allot one-tenth of the time (approximately ten or twelve minutes of the programme) to political subjects—possibly six minutes to a representative right and left wing debate in speech, natural photography and moving diagrams on the theory and practice of the League of Nations, unashamedly following the technique of the three-minute Atlantic films if it were not possible to find a simpler. The other five minutes might go to an exposition of a common policy regarding the housing and slum clearance problem. Time would in every case be allotted to subjects before the consideration of costs, for the common ground of the league

would be the avoidance of boredom, and the shorter films would not demand an expenditure proportionate in regard to length with the longer films.

There is no point in making a precise statement regarding a possible first programme. Subscribers would doubtless insist first on tabulating their dislikes and would find much ground therein for mutual agreement, as the replies to questionnaires on this subject so often indicate. Few of them would approve of the indiscriminate use of music to fill pauses in the sound track or to bolster an otherwise boring scene: they would insist on the scene being designed in an entertaining manner or the matter being put over in a different, maybe an entirely new, way. They would also demand of their experts that they study the methods which Hollywood adopts to avoid the class snobbery that is so prevalent in British films: the old-fashioned presentation of commissioned officers and employers and people of "good birth" (as it is called) as normal and right-minded, and of non-commissioned officers and men, and servants and members of the working classes as comic relief and inferior in mental qualities and development. They would point out that a gala premiere at boosted prices and a snob Press reaction may divert the attention of wealthy laymen from the real values in films so presented, but will cut no ice with products backed by half a million citizens at a shilling a time. A good deal more plain speaking would clear the ground for a statement of what the articulate filmgoer really does want.

Naturally this would be the moment for the sympathetic experts to indicate what the subscribers' shilling a time would be insufficient to buy. Funds would not allow the engaging of high-priced players, though there is no knowing that such folk might not cut their fees considerably when they discovered the nature of the subjects to be chosen. So many stars demand high fees for film work to enable them to spend half the year doing worth-while and less remunerative work on the stage. The stage might be the loser if these same stars could find more ambitious and intelligent work to do on the screen.

Would it be so difficult to build up a programme that would be agreeable to our league of audiences, consisting of one long film with some measure of story value—witty or serious—but the length not determined by existing commercial conventions; one shorter film like a pithy short story, chosen as a direct contrast to the longer film—if the longer were amusing, the shorter could be tragic or at least serious, possibly but not necessarily a documentary; a news review done on generous and less immediate lines than the conventional newsreel or even than the *March of Time*; our political reel, if the subscribers voted that way. And last but not least a reel for experimental work which would not otherwise get a chance of finding practical expression—new kinds of trick films in silhouette, drawing and plastic substances—for the league would grow to pride itself on its encouragement of innovation. And if there were any cash to spare, a "rebel" reel could be made to represent the tastes of any strong vocal minority who were not fully satisfied with the rest of the programme.

It must be emphasised that to make a profit, and further programmes more ambitious, the performances of this league could not be kept private. But outsiders would have to pay more for their seats and lose other privileges, so that it would be the subscribers' aim to put on so strong a programme that outsiders would join in anticipation of the next one.



## WHAT DO THEY LIKE?

*The Tyneside Film Society recently issued a questionnaire to its members on their likes and dislikes. The results, analysed below by ERNEST DYER, the Society's chairman, make interesting reading*

HOW BIG should a film society be? How far does increase of membership result in dilution of purpose? These are questions often put. A questionnaire recently issued by the Tyneside Film Society provides some of the material for the answers.

That there are certain positive advantages in a large membership is obvious. There is the advantage first of all of finance. On Tyneside last winter, with a membership of 1,200, we were able to show nine programmes comprising all the films listed below and a few others as well, for a subscription of only 12s. a member, and yet to finish up—in spite of a grant of £20 to initiate a Children's Cinema Council, and a similar allocation to a dinner—with a balance on the season's working of over £200.

In the second place a large membership increases the influence of the society within the local community. Dangling the bait of our long mailing-list before an exhibitor we are often able to secure the public exhibition of films that would not otherwise have been booked and to ensure the box-office success of films that have "flopped" in other towns. There are many other ways in which we contrive to fling our weight about. And we can do this because we are no longer looked upon as a body of amateur highbrows, but as a consumers' organisation. We are an organised party within the democracy that votes each week at the pay-desks, and we lobby for our cause. We enjoy a certain prestige. To the dinner to which I have referred we were able to invite not only such celebrities as Mr. Leslie Howard, the Hon. Anthony Asquith and Mr. Oliver Bell, but also, for their edification, the leaders of the civic authorities and of the local cinematograph exhibitors.

But with 1,200 members to consider, it may be asked, can you afford to be as courageous in your choice of programmes as you were when you had only 400 to consider? The answer is that we can afford to be more courageous because now we don't much care if we do lose a few hundred members, whereas before it would have been calamitous to lose a score. A glance over the programmes below will show that the selection has been far from conservative.

At the same time the Committee did not want to feel that it was inflicting programmes upon its members in flat defiance of the majority taste. Applause, it was true, was generous, but odd comments came to our ears to give us pause. We had no doubts at all in our own minds about the cinematic qualities of, say *Spanish Earth*, but just how

far would an audience that had come to carry the outer stigmata of prosperity and "respectability" stand for it? Some said, "we shall have to form a film society within the film society." The replies to the questionnaire, however, put most of the doubts to rest. Altogether nearly 200 papers were posted back—a proportion that secretaries with experience in these matters will recognise as high. In deciding how far the 200 are representative, it is proper to bear in mind that the normal tendency is for the disgruntled to reply and the satisfied not to bother. The replies seemed to be equally distributed amongst old members and new.

All told, they constitute an overwhelming endorsement of the Committee's policy. Generally speaking the ranking of films by members corresponds to the Selection's own estimate.

It is, of course, clear that the appeal of our Film Society is a sum of minority appeals. Members were asked to rank the films in each section in order of cinematic merit.



Most Popular

*La Kermesse Héroïque*



There are only three films out of the forty-five that are not placed by some members or other at the head of their section. Even *Metropolitan Nocturne*, almost the only film that the Selection Committee reproached itself for booking (for we have few facilities for advance viewing), was ranked above all other films in its section by eight members.

The task of analysing the returns was one of some complexity. Over 8,000 separate entries had to be recorded. It was realised that the detailed order of preference indicated by members was of less importance than the general preferences indicated, so rather than attempt to assess the relative weight to be accorded to, say, a No. 3 vote and a No. 8 vote, a broad division was made, roughly half-way down the list.

From the totals printed below certain papers covering only part of the season have been excluded. The number of replies analysed is 168.

#### FICTION FILMS (9 FILMS)

Film	Placed amongst 1st 4 by	Placed amongst remaining 5 by	Deleted as not worth booking
<i>La Kermesse Héroïque</i>	156	12	0
<i>New Gulliver</i>	105	42	3
<i>Front Page</i>	82	58	4
<i>We from Kronstadt</i>	77	75	1
<i>Virtuous Isidore</i>	57	74	6
<i>Old and Young King</i>	53	83	1
<i>Golem</i>	51	70	1
<i>Music im Blut</i>	51	75	1
<i>Hauptmann von Koeppenik</i>	49	88	2

It will be seen from the above figures that four films emerge as the most admired. The remainder are grouped very much at the same level.

#### SHORTER FICTION FILMS (4 FILMS)

Film	Placed No. 1 or 2 by	Placed amongst remainder by	Deleted
<i>And so to Work</i>	130	10	0
<i>Bluebottles</i>	78	61	1
<i>Der Zerbrochene Krug</i>	51	80	3
<i>Soap Bubbles</i>	47	86	2

#### DOCUMENTARIES (12 FILMS)

Film	Placed amongst 1st 6 by	Placed amongst remainder by	Deleted
<i>Spanish Earth</i>	135	16	3
<i>Land Without Bread</i>	101	44	3
<i>Tschierva Hut</i>	98	22	0
<i>Children at School</i>	88	40	2
<i>Plow that Broke the Plains</i>	88	42	0
<i>March of Time (Selected)</i>	86	47	2
<i>Magie de Fer Blanc</i>	85	48	1
<i>Eastern Valley</i>	73	47	1
<i>Today We Live</i>	68	33	1
<i>Smoke Menace</i>	50	62	0
<i>Message from Geneva</i>	40	71	1
<i>For All Eternity</i>	27	60	2

#### INSTRUCTIONAL (6 FILMS)

Film	Placed amongst 1st 3 by	Placed amongst remainder by	Deleted
<i>Story of a Disturbance</i>	117	25	0
<i>Heredity in Man</i>	109	35	3
<i>How a Cartoon is Made</i>	89	56	1
<i>Expansion of Germany</i>	68	62	0
<i>How Talkies Talk</i>	58	81	2
<i>Changes in the Franchise</i>	51	77	2

#### CARTOON, ABSTRACTS, ETC. (14 FILMS).

Film	Placed amongst 1st 7 by	Placed amongst remainder by	Deleted
<i>Alpine Climbers</i>	124	8	0
<i>Papageno</i>	115	14	4
<i>Phillips' Big Broadcast</i>	96	23	0
<i>Trade Tattoo</i>	88	31	3
<i>Galatea</i>	77	27	3
<i>Der Jager Toni</i>			
<i>Schaffts</i>	69	25	0
<i>N. or N.W.?</i>	64	41	8
<i>Little Paper People</i>	62	43	2
<i>Publicity Shorts</i>	50	40	0
<i>In der Nacht</i>	47	47	2
<i>The Tower</i>	47	47	1
<i>Metropolitan Nocturne</i>	43	58	12
<i>Brumes d'Automne</i>	35	59	11
<i>3 Primitives</i>	26	53	2

NOTE: in all the above tables the 'remainder' figure includes deletions).

#### TYPES OF SHORT FILM (5 TYPES)

Type	Placed 1st or 2nd	Remainder
Documentary	125	33
Instructional	72	80
Cartoons	56	93
Short Fiction	43	107
Abstracts	30	113

Space was provided on the questionnaire paper for comment, and full use was taken by many members of this opportunity. Many of their remarks are of domestic importance only. Here is one that is of wider validity.

"Surrounded every week-day with the dinginess, dullness, and ugliness of industrial Newcastle and its sordid labouring class streets I crave for films showing us something *beautiful*. I have not been well satisfied with the films shown to us; several have interested me, yet they are very lacking in the *beauty* which I want."

To which the reply is, I suppose, that it represents a kind of romantic escapism against which our documentary school of film-makers and the film society movement itself have reacted vigorously in recent years. Flaherty represented it to some extent. But the gospel of Grierson, Rotha and their disciples is that the beauty is all around us if we look—in Newcastle, in our drab streets. An *Industrial Britain*, a *Shipyard*, a *Night Mail*, an *Eastern Valley* find drama and a certain lyricism in the facts of our community life.

But while a large membership in a film society does not involve any lowering of standards, it does present certain other problems. Members increasingly complain of talking, audible translation of dialogue, and, especially, the noisy disappearance of people under the seats to scrounge for hats and coats during the final scenes before joining a rush to the exits to beat "The King" and the consequent congestion at the car parks. The Committee has had to appeal for better audience manners and to threaten stern action. It is clear from the replies that many members are prepared to back the Committee to any extremity in combating this menace.

Members were also asked to nominate films that they would like shown. The recommendations totalled over 150. They included requests for Chinese, Japanese and Turkish films, and for the showing of French and German films without translated titles. "I think," says a member, "that most people could follow the story even if they could not follow the script—that was my own position in listening to *Front Page*."



## SHIPS AND SEALING WAX

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ANDREW BUCHANAN *chats about a lot of things, including motor cars, traffic blocks and, just in passing, of course, the 1938 Films Act*

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DO YOU REMEMBER the old days when motorists gave signals? Before turning right, left or stopping, they gave little signs, often incorrectly, but they meant well. Nowadays, amidst ever-increasing confusion, carts and codes, hordes of drivers give no signals at all. I know. I drive every day. I do not exaggerate, and that is why my words appear exaggerated. We have been warned and drilled to such a degree, and made so very conscious of the Rules of the Road, that we have forgotten why we began to drive on it. Once upon a time, the object was to reach a specific destination at a given time, of course. Now, London's roads resemble a badly-designed patchwork quilt, in the folds of which we doze contentedly for hours—contentedly, because we somehow feel that the chaos cannot really be chaos in view of the vast number of traffic regulations now in force. Perhaps you have not thought of it in that way. Maybe you persist in giving signals. Possibly you prefer the policy of applying superficial treatment to major problems, to the irksome business of digging down to the roots, finding they are suffering from incurable disease, and pulling them out.

But what on earth has all that to do with films which, one feels, should be referred to, however, briefly, in these pages? Nothing, really, save that it shows what invariably happens when anything becomes civilised and/or commercialised. Traffic confusion is nourished by a giant manufacturing industry which naturally seeks to sell as many cars as possible, regardless of the fact that roads are already dangerously overcrowded. Does the manufacturer care? Of course not. Neither would I if I made cars. But increasing danger rightly demands Government attention, and so insurance becomes law, and competitive insurance companies become rich. So far, so bad. But the national characteristic is to make the best of it; to be truly thankful this is a free country, in which we are free to sit in the best organised traffic blocks in the world. Free to spend all the money we have left after paying our income tax. Free to express political opinions, providing, of course, they are respectable. Being free, we shower pity on the "oppressed" citizens in Europe. How dreadful it must be to be systematised, instead of being free to muddle along anyhow. How awful to be militarised, we murmur, as we gaze at our peace-loving forces parading at tattoos, tournaments, weddings, funerals and all other available functions.

You see, whatever civilisation touches, it infects. Every original constructive plan or intention becomes hidden in time by rules and regulations devised to help it out of the chaos created by human greed. But you cannot rationalise the soul of an artist, though you may handle him so that his work becomes a profitable proposition, instead of what appears to be a waste of time. Usually, however, regulations intended to encourage the artist, strangle him, just as the

horse and cart, superseded, but still persisting, paralyses the motor car.

It appears that without Government aid during the past ten years, the British film industry could not have succeeded. The fact that it failed with such aid merely adds to the confusion. I do not happen to believe in Government aid for an industry, so designed that it leaves the industry free to abuse the aid. If film-making in this country is to succeed, it must either be entirely free of all Governmental regulations, or else be completely under the control of the Government, and whichever way it is (please forget it is neither) the artist should be given primary consideration—and by artist, I do not mean the irresponsible genius who makes abstract adaptations of algebraical problems to replace Shirley Temple. I refer to the sane creative person upon whom film production depends (strange as it seems) as much as it does on the sane financier—both being rather difficult to find. Now the new Film Bill has, in many ways, ignored the artist. Furthermore, it has attempted to give life to a dead industry—dead because it thrust the dagger into its own heart, though it sought to prove the handle was gripped by America. How much wiser it would have been to create an entirely new industry. The trouble is that rules and regulations are of little use unless made by people who understand the *fundamental* (not to be confused with *financial*) reason why they are necessary, and the reason why the British film industry needed pulling out of the swamp was because it did not happen to be British—its foundations having been moulded, *by us*, exactly to the American pattern, and, as far as I can see, those same foundations remain embedded in the swamp.

### AMERICA'S JOB AND BRITAIN'S

Now when the foundations of a toppling structure have been made from unsuitable material, permanent strength cannot be given to that structure merely by painting it. The foundations need to be dug out, and replaced by new ones, made of the right material. How very elementary. Unfortunately, one cannot reach the top form without having passed through the kindergarten. Of course one can buy a cap and gown at a costumiers, but an ill wind is bound to blow them away. But what is all this about the foundations of the British film industry being designed in America? Tour the studios. Gaze on the output of the past. Firstly, you will recognise (even if you have not been to Hollywood) that the elaborate formula for film-making has been copied, in detail, from America. Because that formula works in the country which originated it, is no guarantee it will work here. But we, who copy so well, and originate so little, have believed that America's method is the one and only way to make films. We have never sat down to think out how to make British films, as distinct



from making films in Britain. Technically, we have succeeded; creatively, we have hovered; financially, we have failed; for what may be comparatively normal expenditure in Hollywood is a gross waste of money here. We shut ourselves in studios, and when one is in a studio, and cannot see the outside world, one might be in London, Paris or Hollywood. And all this studiostic business has cost a great deal of money, for we have been so intent on copying Hollywood that we have never stopped to learn how to make first-class pictures cheaply. The machinery with which we have surrounded ourselves makes economical production practically impossible. But we have found a justification for spending. We declare our aim is to make super films which will penetrate into the American market. Super films can only be made by spending a lot of money and we can only afford to do that if we recover some of it from American distribution. Sometimes, we have secured that distribution, but not often. It is hardly likely we know how to entertain the American public when we have really not discovered how to entertain the British public. The big pictures made here have been excellent, and the big pictures which will be made in the future by American companies in Britain will also be excellent, but they will not help to build a British film industry on solid foundations, for the function of such an industry will not be to make big pictures—that is, big in expenditure—but merely big in conception. That is America's job. They make big ships on the Clyde, but they are content to make rowing boats at Richmond. They grow bananas in the Bahamas, but we are content merely to eat them. There are some things we cannot do, just as there are others we can do better than any other nation. We do not seem to have grasped that point, in our eagerness to grasp everything else. Of course there are encouraging signs. Several studios are now making truly British films, more economically than hitherto; films which will prove profitable from distribution in the home market alone. That is logical and good business, but isolated examples of sanity cannot build an industry of national importance; neither can a Film Bill, which surrounds the artist with so many clauses and stipulations that he finds himself making pictures to conform to rules instead of making them as he visualised them. They must cost so much. He may not wish to spend that sum. He may not need to spend that sum—but he *must*. That ensures quality! There are to be no more Quickies to bring disrepute on the industry. Was it the Quickies which brought the disrepute? Why not say no more *bad* Quickies? A first-class film can be made under normal conditions for five thousand pounds, and an extremely bad one can be made for one hundred thousand pounds. Quality cannot be measured in terms of cash. And yet it is, simply because of the high cost of essential apparatus, which is the first problem the Government should have tackled. Studios, too, are expensive. Not so expensive as they used to be, but more expensive than they should be. Economical production cannot be possible whilst every branch of an industry maintains high charges which, in the first instance, were copied from Hollywood. It is infinitely wiser to put all one knows into production instead of taking as much as one can out of it. A commercial industry, however, does not regard the position in that light, and never will until the Government takes it over, or throws it over. In the latter case, it would destroy itself entirely, which would offer hope for the future. Even to-day, vast numbers of people

talk of their "prestige". This man would not contemplate writing a short script for less than four hundred guineas. That fellow would be insulted if offered less than a hundred pounds a week to look at a camera. Big money has been obtained before, and is demanded again. These people have placed a market value on themselves, but have overlooked the fact that the product they used to make was unmarketable from a profitable point of view. Of course a constant flow of British pictures is essential to counteract the American output, but is it possible with rules and regulations linked to an industry filled with inflated views? Is there a solution? I am sure there is, and it is not very technical. It entails forgetting the past—and the present. Then we start scratch. If anyone mentions Hollywood, we should look up and ask, "Where's that?" Equipment should cost exactly what it should cost, which is much less than it does cost. Every writer, technician and artist should be paid in proportion to the size of the picture being made, which should be in proportion to the size of the industry, which should be in proportion to the size of this market, which should be, strangely enough, in proportion to the size of this country, and not America. If their prestige prevents them working for sane sums, they can continue to remain inactive—dignified, aloof, living on the fragrant memories of the inglorious past.

#### THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG WAY

Quite the wrong way to make films in Britain is to start at the top and work downwards. Some declare film-making is unlike anything else. That is precisely what is wrong with it. It should be just like everything else which succeeds—the recipe being to begin at the bottom and work up. Is it too late to suggest that? Surely it would be wiser than building yet another story on to that toppling structure, and then watching the whole lot crash. Film-making is, after all, rather like the traffic problem. Remove all the vehicles and it's settled. Making films in Britain would be quite sound were it not for the film makers. It is merely that civilisation has stepped in. But surely the miracle of talking pictures is a product of civilised man? Yes, but civilisation has a way of swallowing its young. It has a way of saying that everything must be commercial; a film must be box office, and then it is discovered there are not enough box offices to make it box office. Not very deep, you think. But the film industry is not very deep. It has merely been given a semblance of depth by all the complicated rules which seek to free it, providing it continues to wear the chains. Yes, I know about American invasion, and mighty powers and interests. I know, too, we have, in many ways, strengthened the forces which are said to oppose us. I also know that if we could begin again, and for the sake of the nation, reprice everything needed for film-making, from the focus board to the film stock, and made distinctly British films which projected the country as it really is (at least, the pleasant parts of it), we should need neither bills nor bandages. If only our highly successful documentalists had a little more money, and a little less muddle, and the fictional feature fellows had a little more originality and a great deal less money, and the Government made them both into a nice fat sandwich, the result would be a combination that would supply just the right sort of material with which to rebuild the feeble foundations of the toppling structure upon which they are now standing, and hoping they are firm enough to last until—well, until the expiration of the new Film Bill.



## SHAKESPEARE AND THE FILMS

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*In a recent film about Mary Queen of Scots, according to a book reviewed below, "only spats were lacking to make of Bothwell the perfect figure of a modern itinerant piper"*

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**We Make the Movies.** Edited by Nancy Naumberg. Faber & Faber. 10s. 6d.

The method of the symposium as applied to the compilation of film-books grows more and more popular. In a case like the present, where the editor is attempting to provide a survey of all aspects of production in the highly-departmentalised modern American studio, such a method, bringing together a variety of expert workers, each to tell his own tale, would seem to have many advantages. But though some of these advantages are real, they are balanced by certain important drawbacks.

In approximately 250 pages are to be found sixteen separate articles, the longest (the cameraman's), thirty pages, the shortest (the set-designer's), ten. The result, in several ways interesting, gives, however, an inevitable effect of cramping, and also of continual overlappings of description from one section to another; while the exact relation of one function to another and to the general scheme is by no means always obvious. The hierarchy of production-activities might conceivably have been better elucidated by one individual, not primarily interested in any single activity and therefore more ready to allot to each its precise place.

There is on the whole nothing æsthetically critical or evaluative about the book's main purpose, which is simply to offer a guide to the complicated mechanics of picture-making. From various points of view this is at least as much a virtue as a defect; but again the means adopted tends at times to defeat itself. So much cataloguing of bare information in sections makes the book difficult to read through directly; while on the other hand it is impossible to regard the book as a work of reference, since the information, limited by space, is insufficiently detailed. One might add that a few more diagrams and illustrations, carefully chosen, could have lightened a part of the writers' tasks. There are already, it is true, nearly thirty illustrations, but most of them are general rather than immediately explanatory.

Weaknesses or no, *We Make the Movies* should achieve at any rate one desirable end. It should demonstrate plainly, to the most lay of lay readers, that film-making is a vast and complex process, involving any amount of preparation and organisation, and that accordingly outside criticism, while undeniably necessary, requires a considerable foundation of understanding. It should also give the amateur something to think about, for too many amateurs seem to have an idea that the taking of pains indicates an unprofessional attitude.

Walt Disney, who is not merely the head of a department but of a whole elaborate organisation on its own, contributes an apposite final chapter; and he is preceded by an account of some of the problems of a colour-designer. The remainder of the book, which endeavours to trace the progress of a film from hand to hand, starting with the producer, includes a sincere and intelligent statement on

acting by Paul Muni, a companion-essay by Bette Davis, and a slightly ironic sketch of the vicissitudes of a script, from a practised "screen-hack", Sidney Howard. "Screen-hack" is his own expression.

A. VESSELO

**Shakespearian Costume for Stage and Screen.** F. M. Kelly. A. & C. Black. 8s. 6d.

**Costuming The Biblical Play.** Lucy Barton. A. & C. Black. 5s.

Any director contemplating a film set in the years between 1520 and 1620 should send for Mr. Kelly's book. Here is a practical and eminently sensible survey of an intricate subject: the chapter on the "nice conduct" of period costume must satisfy all who have been offended by the massed anachronisms of Hollywood's more desperately historical films. Mr. Kelly recalls *Mary of Scotland* in which "only spats were lacking to make of Bothwell the perfect figure of a modern itinerant piper". On the other hand, he praises the French film *Le Kermesse Héroïque*, with its Flemish burghers and their wives who might have stepped out of canvases by Hals, de Keyser or Mytens, and he has chosen for his frontispiece an excellent photograph of Madame Francoise Rosay as the burgomaster's wife.

It will be realised that Mr. Kelly does not confine himself to the Shakespearian plays. His book, admirably illustrated, is the record of a century. I commend his section on colours (pp. 44-46) to the notice of any director with a Tudor colour-film in mind. He shows that the importance of black in the Elizabethan scene is often under-estimated, and that all-black was unimpeachable wear, equally suitable for all "pretenders to gentility from the highest in the land to the shabby-genteel". White was the most favoured colour at Court, followed by red (scarlet, rose, crimson), yellow (primrose, to deep saffron), purple (murrey, violet), green and grey. Blue, it would seem, was a "distinctly bourgeois" colour, used for apprentices, servants' livery and soldiers' regulation coats.

This is one of Mr. Kelly's warnings: "The most perfect of perfect of settings will go for nothing if the actor refuses to make up in accordance with time and place—and subject. An American actor has no more excuse to jib at Parnell's full beard than to play Abraham Lincoln with shaven chin and a moustache." Although I hope that we have seen the last of Shakespeare on the screen, it is good to know that such an authoritative work as Mr. Kelly's exists: directors have now no possible excuse for carelessness.

Miss Barton's little book on Biblical costume is comprehensive and crisp. Do not, she pleads, send into your Nativity scene "either a trio of Santa Clauses or the choir tenor, baritone and bass draped in someone's velour *portières*." So Miss Barton, too, has met the amateur Magi! There are good line drawings by David Sarvis and the table of materials and their uses in costuming is sound and valuable.

J. C. TREWIN



## AN ARGUMENT

*A slight disagreement between GORDON F. WOOLLIAMS and THOROLD DICKINSON  
concerning the former's article in the last number of SIGHT AND SOUND*

To the Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND  
SIR,

In your issue of Spring, 1938, you published an article by Mr. Gordon F. Woolliams entitled "Nigerian Nights". The first sentence in the article reads: "The first real cinema in Lagos, Nigeria, was opened a few months ago". The article further suggests the encouragement of running cinema shows at European prices in other parts of the country. You state in your preamble to the article that the author has himself spent three years on the west coast of Africa.

My experience of the west coast of Africa consists of a mere month and a half in Sept.-Oct., 1936. Permit me to quote from some notes I made on October 12th, 1936, while flying the length of French Dahomey, from Cotonou to Niamey, on my way home. "These European ports are fitted into the West African coast like new shopfronts—Paris calls them *culottes*, I believe—which are fitted onto the façades of old buildings. And each port echoes its country of origin faithfully. One would imagine that Lagos (in the manner of Cotonou) would find its climate suitable for a touch of the Mediterranean shore in its make-up—café terraces on the edge of the lagoon, for instance. But no. The only hotel in Lagos (one of the very few in Nigeria) is in the middle of the town and is resolutely house-like. You can sit out of doors at the clubs, on invitation from members, but these are all inland except the yacht club, and that has no bar. . . .

### EUROPEANS ARE ALLOWED A COOP

"There is a talkie cinema in Lagos where one can drink beer and watch four-year old sound films in the open air but few Europeans go there, and the natives prefer the silent cinemas. They can read the captions (or not) and follow a silent film more easily than understand the American dialect and the static action of the early talkies. All cinemas hereabouts, being in the open air, function only after dusk, usually giving one performance, and the natives comment loudly on the silent action throughout the programme and during the intervals occasioned by the use of a single projector. Europeans are allowed to sit in a large coop at the back on tip-up seats. The natives sit on benches in the threepennies and the penny seats are often merely old kerosene cans and wooden boxes. The darkness hides a multitude of junk which lies in front of the screen, ladders, old bicycles, bits of old iron—a branch of the Caledonian Market. The programmes consist of old serials, one was by Universal and bore the old distribution trademark of the Transatlantic Film Co.—and one full-length film, dating from between twenty-five years ago and the arrival of talkies. The nicest names among those of the half-dozen silent cinemas in Lagos are the SAKA JOJO and the DEO JUVANTE. . . ."

My purpose in writing to you is to draw attention to the author's somewhat woolly interpretation of the meaning of the word *real* in the quotation in my first paragraph. And also to suggest that while the black man as well as the

white has a pocket, the idea of the black man paying three and six for a seat at the pictures is as feasible as a dustman shelling out a couple of guineas for a seat at Glyndebourne.

THOROLD DICKINSON

SIR,

The word "real" to which Mr. Dickinson seems to take exception, was used advisedly in order to exclude the ramshackle place he so picturesquely describes. In fact, it had not occurred to me to classify it as a serious cinema.

Since the date of Mr. Dickinson's visit, however, the cinema described in my article, "Nigerian Nights", has been opened, and only last week I received a letter from the Editor of the *Nigerian Daily Times* informing me that there is now a second one in Lagos, and that arrangements are being made for yet another to be opened shortly.

It looks, therefore, as though other people have realised the possibilities, and appreciate the rate at which the "Coast" is being developed. An idea of this can be gathered from the fact that three years ago there was one mail-boat a fortnight, whereas it is now common for as many as five or six vessels to arrive with mail in a week, in addition to the Imperial Airways' weekly service.

### —THE WEST INDIES

I have also lived for four years in the West Indies, where a chain of cinemas has been in operation for a long time, and although the West Indian natives are undoubtedly more advanced, it seems to me that progress in the main West African towns is rapidly overhauling them, and that the time is ripe for the cinema to advance into this new field.

The Glover Hall Cinema was primarily intended, as I stated, for Europeans, but in spite of Mr. Dickinson's amusing remarks, a number of Africans do pay 3s. 6d. for admission. It should not be forgotten that there are several Africans in Government Service in Lagos who draw four figure incomes.

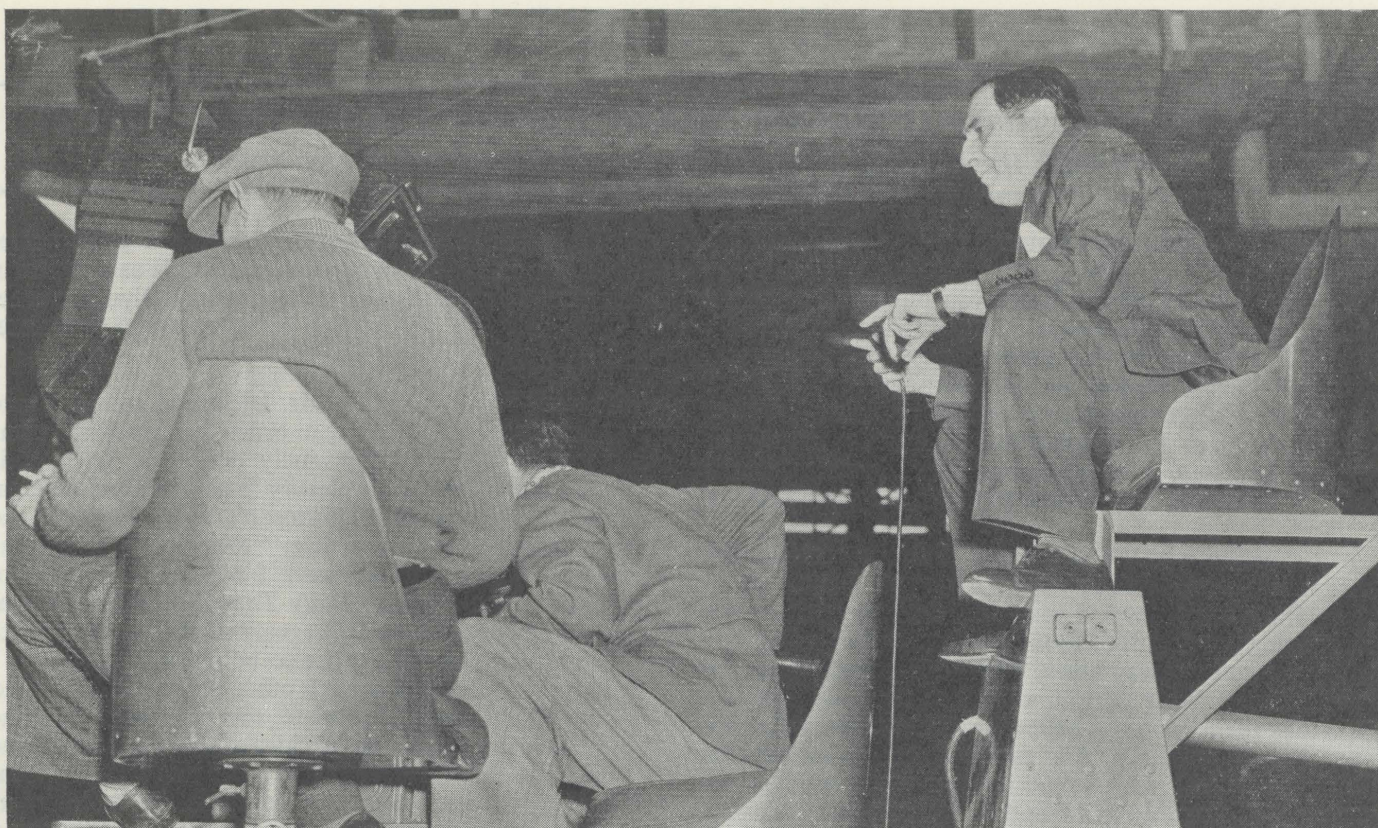
Such a price would, of course, be absurd for the mass of the poorer natives, but there was nothing in my article to suggest otherwise. In fact, I clearly stated that "prices should be kept low", and they should certainly be graded, much as they are elsewhere. Europeans and well-to-do Africans could still pay 3s. 6d., but cheaper seats should also be provided so as to attract larger audiences. This has been found to work successfully in the West Indies, so why not in West Africa?

However true Mr. Dickinson's notes may be regarding the conditions in 1936, they certainly cannot be looked upon as reflecting an accurate picture of the position to-day.

GORDON F. WOOLLIAMS

[The letters printed above form just another proof that it is almost impossible to publish a worthwhile article without causing controversy. We hope that some of you may disagree with a few of the articles in this number. In which case write to us. The columns of SIGHT AND SOUND are always open.]





Ernst Lubitsch directing *Blue Beard's Eighth Wife*

Paramount

## THE OLD LAMPS BURN BRIGHTLY

*The Quarter's revivals and a few new films are dealt with by* ALAN PAGE

IT IS refreshing to Get Away From It All, especially in Corsica where the scenery looks like a Fitzpatrick travelogue and the sun is as hot and as bright as the studio arcs and where I saw PEPE LE MOKO in almost its natural surroundings.

But it is a dangerous thing, this Getting Away From It All. Unless one is very careful one is apt to lose one's sense of proportion and begin wondering whether it is necessary to go to the cinema at all. Evil little thoughts creep into the mind when it is free to think and contemplate. Comparisons and similes suggest themselves and it is only after a stern battle that they are put to rout. Are not films like a religion that demands blind obedience and acceptance of its standards and values and which loses its devotees when they begin to think for themselves? Are not films the magic drug of escape that helps people evade the problems they are unable or unwilling to examine and solve for themselves? Are not films nothing but an industry, often capable of brilliant craftsmanship and ingenious thought-saving devices, but always without soul, without inspiration, separated from art by the impenetrable barrier of the machinery by which they are made? It is indeed high time one came Back To It All.

And now, what's new? Well, our minds are set at rest on one point at least; it is going to be Rhett Gable and Scarlett

O'Shearer for *GONE WITH THE WIND*. The Tivoli Cinema in the Strand is going over to double release programmes. And revivals.

It has long been a practice to make limited reissues of big films during the dead, hot (?), holiday months of the summer. The public are having their one real escape during the year, they do not need the make-believe form of escape during those months, and so the big pictures are saved up for the autumn onslaught. But this time there is a genuine famine and there has been much scurrying down to vaults, checking up on box office receipts and dusting off old smash hits. Fifty or sixty reissues are being made in this country, and over three hundred in America.

It is an interesting list. By its omissions one can see which stars have fallen from box office favour and by its inclusions which stars have retained its favour. One can also see how some of the cycles started. In fact there's food for any amount of instructive and amusing thought, the former kind especially for producers who, now that they have drawn up the list, may very profitably remind themselves of what the public like. Let us take a quick glance down the list. *KING KONG*: magnificent trick photography and Fay Wray screaming her head off made this pretty well the perfect entertainment film.

THINGS TO COME: more trick photography with the first



quarter of the film made grimly topical by its air raids and bombings.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT: the first of the war pictures and still the best and the film that saw the rise of Lew Ayres, now somewhat in the shade again, and the last performance of Louis Wolheim, that rugged mixture of Victor MacLaglen and Wallace Beery.

THE FRONT PAGE: another cycle starter and the best thing that Lewis Milestone has ever done, not to mention Ben Hecht's fine script and the big chance it gave Adolph Menjou to show that he was not just a tailor's dummy.

CITY STREETS: Mamoulian's contribution to movie history, the big break for Sylvia Sydney. And Gary Cooper—he's still at the top.

FAREWELL TO ARMS: Gary Cooper again. And Adolph Menjou. And war. And the incomparable Helen Hayes who gave such a moving performance. We have to go to the theatre and New York if we want to see her now, more's the pity.

DESIGN FOR LIVING: Yet another Gary Cooper film and another Ben Hecht script and as nice a piece of adaptation as you could wish to see. It is a long way from Coward, but it is still good for plenty of laughs. There's Miriam Hopkins, too, and March and Horton, all served up with sauce Lubitsch.

MR. DEEDS: Cooper seems to be in all the best films and the public have learned to know and like their Capra. There's something about Jean Arthur that warms them, too; maybe it's the croak and the comforting feeling that there is a brain beneath the blonde hair. Pixilation is still unique.

LADY FOR A DAY: More Capra, though heavier and not so elegant.

FRANKENSTEIN: the gory that was Karloff.

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE: Trick photography gets 'em every time. March was good, but Miriam Hopkins stole the picture with a remarkable *tour de force* as the cockney girl.

LADIES' MAN, MANHATTAN MELODRAMA and MAN OF THE WORLD: They've all got William Powell in them.

TREASURE ISLAND and THE CHAMP: Master Jackie Cooper in his salad days. The former remains one of the best films for children, and the latter is a classic among tear-jerkers.

TWO SECONDS and THE HONOURABLE MR. WONG: Edward G. Robinson in a good and a bad film. There seems no reason why the latter should be revived unless it is that Loretta Young has a very big following. And she is not exactly herself with almond eyes and black fringe.

PLATINUM BLONDE: early Capra, with two stars who are now dead, Jean Harlow and Robert Williams, and a lovely sequence of the latter playing hopscotch on a marble floor through sheer boredom.

THE BIG HOUSE: Lewis Milestone's prison story, and a small part for one, Robert Montgomery.

CIMARRON and BACK STREET: Irene Dunne has had to fight to get out of these sort of films, but you can't keep a good comedienne down.

STREET SCENE: the film of Elmer Rice's play. We know our New York slums pretty well now, but there's a good story here and the beginning of Sylvia Sydney's screen sufferings.

TRADER HORN: few could resist this call of the wild.

HENRY VIII: Exhibit A. in the British film industry, the origin of the Korda Legend and the birthplace of British stars. Take away Laughton and see if there is anything left.

SANDERS OF THE RIVER: how to deal with natives, providing you have a Paul Robeson on hand.

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL: British production at its glossiest and most opulent and Leslie Howard being just what every schoolboy imagined the Pimpernel to be.

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO and CAPTAIN BLOOD: the better sword and cloak films. The public see all too little of Donat, and Errol Flynn will soon be with us as Robin Hood.

THE BARRETTS OF WIMPOLE STREET: Norma Shearer at her most melting and Laughton in another fine character study.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: A curious revival this, for it is certainly not one of de Mille's best. But still it has got Claudette Colbert, though it is probable she would rather not have attention drawn to the fact.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS and THE 39 STEPS: Will Hay has come into his own now, while Hitchcock in the latter got more out of Madeleine Carroll than any other director has succeeded in getting.

MATA HARI: An interesting choice from the Garbo films. Perhaps it is because spy stories are popular now.

That covers most of the reissues and it will be noted that there are no musicals included, a wise omission in view of the bad odour into which they have recently fallen. There were, however, a couple of good ones last quarter. DOCTOR RHYTHM has Bing Crosby and Beatrice Lillie and between them they manage to pull off a thin story, while MAD ABOUT MUSIC has Deanna Durbin achieving the impossible and eclipsing her previous two films. The story is poised halfway between reality and fairyland and is directed by Norman Taurog entirely from the child's point of view. This is the secret of the success of the Durbin films.

The long awaited YANK AT OXFORD was unveiled with much public acclaim. Without being an epic it is a highly competent job of work. The story has all the routine situations to be expected in a college setting, but what gets it across is the atmosphere of Oxford, gay and charming by turns, and the persuasive performance of Robert Taylor.

From Denham came THE CHALLENGE, the story of Whymper's climb up the Matterhorn. Luis Trenker was responsible for the mountaineering sequences and they are a marvel of beauty and excitement, but a stupid story has been grafted on and just spoils what might otherwise have been an exceptional film. CONVICT 99 was another British production. It suffers from a series of anti-climaxes, but Will Hay is better than ever and right in his element as the governor of a crazy prison.

There were two big colour films. THE DRUM is British to the core, with Sabu as an Indian prince on the North West Frontier rescuing the garrison from a wicked Khan and all the characters, true, or rather untrue, to type. TOM SAWYER is American to the core, a remake of the Mark Twain story that captures the spirit of the children and the atmosphere of the old Mississippi life with great success.

Charles Laughton gave us a treat in VESSEL OF WRATH. The story is too slight for the film, but it is a highly civilised production, full of wit and satire and marvellously acted by Laughton. His performance is like a tropical plant of riotous growth and high-coloured flowers, but it needs pruning badly. Elsa Lanchester has a big part and she is superb.

Crazy comedy was represented by JOY OF LIVING. Irene Dunne and Douglas Fairbanks frolic about in this, disguising the thin story with considerable skill. Then there was also A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER, a Runyon fable with Edward G. Robinson. This is a sparkling farce, if you don't mind laughing at four corpses, extremely well acted and bristling with wisecracks.





*I Accuse*

THE ANSCHLUSS has come; Austria as a national unit has gone; and Vienna, the gay, the carefree, the last shrunken stronghold of that old exotic Empire, the memory of whose bedecked pre-War face has launched a thousand films, will no longer send its pleasant trifles for our Continentophiles to smile at and admire. Like the last whisper of an ancient refrain comes *Der Spiegel* to remind us.

We need not pretend that *Der Spiegel* is a particularly outstanding film. It does indeed touch on a theme of some interest—the antagonism between the Austrian medical profession and the unorthodox healers who apparently practise their “quackeries” all over the country; but, as so often on the screen, the true problem is disappointingly shelved after a very short while, and conventional romantic complications set in instead. The film’s virtues are the slenderer ones: some attractive ski-ing exteriors, intervals of full-dress Tyrolean singing in the usual style, and, more generally, the presence of Paula Wessely in the lead and of the efficient Geza von Bolvary in the director’s chair. Nothing extraordinary, but just enough to be characteristic in a slight way.

Certainly the portentous jollifications of *Die Austernlilli* offer little hope that Greater Germany will improve on what it has swept away. The plot of this singing-and-dancing comedy appears to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the stock plot of all singing-and-dancing comedies, in which troops of damsels frequently invade the scene at inappropriate moments. In order, no doubt, to indicate concretely to the less discerning that the atmosphere is one of gaiety, the main background is Paris; and everyone eats, drinks and wisecracks with great intensity, while the camera chases continually backwards and forwards in the endeavour to give an air of movement.

From the opposite side of the political frontier we have the Soviet *Son of Mongolia*, made by Ilya Trauberg and shown to the Film Society in a Mongolian language-version. As with the majority of Soviet films, propaganda

## YOU WILL REMEMBER VIENNA

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*Austria, that carefree land, will no longer send its pleasant trifles for us to smile at and admire. But, says ARTHUR VESSELO in his review of continental films below, “like the last whisper of an ancient refrain comes ‘Der Spiegel’ to remind us”*

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is the main theme, here directed against the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo, and designed for the benefit of the inhabitants of Outer Mongolia, on whose soil the film was shot.

The film is simply-conceived, for a simple peasant-audience, and it is in line with this that the central idea should be a commonplace of folk-lore brought Communistically up-to-date. The story of the local youth who goes off on his travels and after many adventures returns a hero has been revised in a propagandist sense so that his travels—in search of a fictitious “enchanted garden” to which he is despatched by a rascally monk—carry him over the border into Manchukuo, where he enters into conflict with the tyrannous Japanese authorities. Having given a good account of himself, he escapes again into his own state, and there utters a public monologue glorifying the Mongolian Republic by contrast with the overbearing rule of the Japanese.

A feeling of deliberate unsophistication is dominant. The characters are emphasised as types: the simple but worthy peasant; the crafty monk, neatly-drawn, with his false promises of immaterial gain; or the Japanese officer, sharply-outlined figure of a military despot, left finally shaking his fist in frustrated rage. Action and technique are both uncomplicated, with touches of a formalisation often found in Russian films: occasionally, even, the manner seems almost crude. But the film’s major virtue is in the picture which it draws of Mongolian life and habits and environment—a picture which political underscorings cannot make less intimately real. Actors and musicians of the Mongolian State Theatre contribute their share, and they and their producers have given us at times the very breath of the Mongolian plains.

From Soviet Russia comes also Alexandrov’s *The Circus*. It was Alexandrov who was responsible for the much fought-over *Jazz Comedy*, and from the present film it seems as if he must have become official Soviet exponent of “American” musical-comedy technique. Not only are editing, camera-work and so on executed largely in efficient American style, but a considerable part of the



theme itself is concerned with the idea that Russia ought to be able to furnish mass-entertainment with as much or more success than America. Hence the symbol of the circus; hence, too, the grand finale of Busby-Berkeley spectacle, complete with a hugger-mugger of girls, legs, lights, whirling turn-tables and slick angles.

The film is however loaded with a further and more obvious purpose, relating to an American woman acrobat who is forced to flee her own country because she has an illegitimate negro child, and who finds a haven of refuge in Russia. When, in her new home, the secret of the child is finally revealed, her fears turn to happiness, since in Russia the racial prejudices of the Capitalist world mean nothing. This tale has its points, and the end is certainly capable of rousing sympathy; but the characterisation is apt to descend to the sheerest melodramatic caricature, and the continuity is in any case too much broken up with long-winded song-and-dance passages. The mix-up of themes is unfortunate, and makes for weak and obscure construction. There is, indeed, a third element, this time of pure comedy—dexterously handled, with an excellent chief comedian, but again weakening the general structure. An imperfect whole; but if Alexandrov could learn to understand human beings better, and to attend more to continuity of development, he might turn out a really good light piece.

The remaining half-dozen or so films, as one might expect, are all French. Colombier's *Le Roi S'Amuse* brings us once more to politics, though the intention now is strictly satirical. "Le Roi" is the ruler of a mythical kingdom, on a state visit to Paris, who takes the opportunity there to indulge his amorous inclinations. In so doing he treads on the toes of a wealthy "Democrat-Communist", whom

he therefore placates by causing him to be elevated to high political dignities which he has long striven after in vain. The moral is pointed mischievously at the end: "See," we are informed, "how Democracy allows merit unaided to rise to the top."

The humorous principle is very close to that established by Lubitsch—that is to say, the individual situations are mostly out of stock, but effective in so far as they are trimmed to novel shape by skilful direction and acting, and by witty repartee accurately-delivered. This method calls for the maximum of directorial finesse: otherwise the flavour begins to resemble that of flat champagne. Even Lubitsch is far from maintaining a consistent level, so that we need not wonder if *Le Roi S'Amuse* has to take time to work itself up, or if here and there it is a trifle obvious. It includes at any rate one or two cleverly-handled sequences, and if neither Raimu as the self-made Democrat nor Victor Francen as the King is as completely at ease as he might be, they both add their quota of conviction, particularly Raimu.

As for the satire as such, one is slightly surprised that the French can still laugh heartily at the rather weary joke about cuckoldry; and the political humours are one-sided. The three points attacked are, in that order, Democracy, hereditary monarchy and decayed aristocracy: is it coincidence that these, in the same order, are the very things attacked by at least one type of violent totalitarian system of which the film makes no mention, a system which, at the present moment, might itself be better worth attack? Perhaps coincidence; perhaps not.

Two of the new issues are alternative versions of films which we have seen before. One of these is Guitry's *Le Roman D'un Tricheur*, now released by Unity Films, under



*Le Roi S'Amuse*



*L'Homme du Jour*



the title *The Cheat*, with a dubbed English commentary to take the place of Guitry's original. This is of course an easier task than the dubbing of a normal dialogue-film, but it has nevertheless been done surprisingly well, and one can almost believe that it is still Guitry talking. The other film is Anatole Litvak's *L'Equipage*, a tale of aviation and love-misunderstandings in the Great War, which has been exhibited here already in an American edition entitled *The Woman Between*, with Paul Muni in the lead. The American copy, too, was directed by Litvak, and the same conventional and romantic treatment of the war-theme is at the bottom of both versions. But the atmosphere of the French film, being native, is considerably more authentic than that of the other; while the French casting is a distinct improvement. Even the displacement of Muni, oddly enough, is in some ways good, since he gave to his rôle an importance which it was not ultimately fully able to bear.

Litvak's hoverings between Paris and Hollywood are likely to be paralleled in the future by Julien Duvivier, who bids temporary farewell to France with the comedy *L'Homme du Jour*. Whether through an excessive desire to display the talents of his star, Maurice Chevalier, or for whatever reason, he has not made an especially satisfying film. Chevalier plays an electrician with stage-hankerings, who gives his blood to save a famous tragedienne, so earning momentary notoriety—a notoriety which departs as quickly as it came, when he disappoints the tragedienne's passionate designs on him. The idea's satirical possibilities are expanded on in the earlier sequences; but the climax comes prematurely and weakly half-way through, and after this the film just meanders. Chevalier is his usual cheerful self, and for that matter the external technique of direction, the handling of crowds, of camera-movements, and so forth, shows a practised hand. But the film has neither unity of structure nor continuity of mood; and since Duvivier has had a personal finger in the script, he can hardly claim to have been let down by his material.

Yet another two-way transatlantic traveller is Charles Boyer, who returns temporarily to France in *Orage*, directed by Marc Allegret from a book by the "duellist-novelist" Henri Bernstein. Although this is undeniably a well-produced film, one is still tempted to ask why there was any need to produce it at all, for in basis it is simply the good old French romantic-triangle formula, with recognisable elements of *Manon Lescaut* and *La Dame Aux Camélias* in modern dress. Except for a few effective but misleading atmospheric opening shots, this many-times-told tale of "people with a high potential capacity for disaster"—to borrow from another context an illuminating phrase of Gilbert Seldes—runs straightforwardly according to precedent. Its brightest ingredient is the persuasive acting of Michèle Morgan as a body-conscious but entirely frank young woman.

The interaction between American and European filmmaking is marked in Pierre Chenal's *L'Alibi*, a sufficiently competent murder-melodrama about American ex-gangsters in Paris. A violent death or two, a thought-reading cabaret-performer to add an unexplained hint of mystery, and an abruptly tacked-on happy ending, are items in a pattern-plot. The film chiefly requires notice for the appearance of Albert Préjean and Louis Jouvet as police-officials, and of that accomplished veteran, Erich von Stroheim, as the sinister thought-reading American who is the villain and focussing-point of the piece.

By far the most impressive effort of this or many quarters is the *J'accuse* of Abel Gance—one of the very few anti-war films ever made which do not end up by merely glorifying what they set out to decry. The story Gance tells is mystically conceived, and deals with a man who, emerging miraculously safe out of the futile horrors of the last war, determines to do all he can to prevent the recurrence of such a world-catastrophe. When, after twenty chaotic years, a yet worse menace approaches, he succeeds by a half-maniacal effort of will in calling up the dead from beneath the overgrown soil of the battlefields, to send confusion into the warmongers' ranks. But in so doing, he brings down mob-vengeance upon himself.

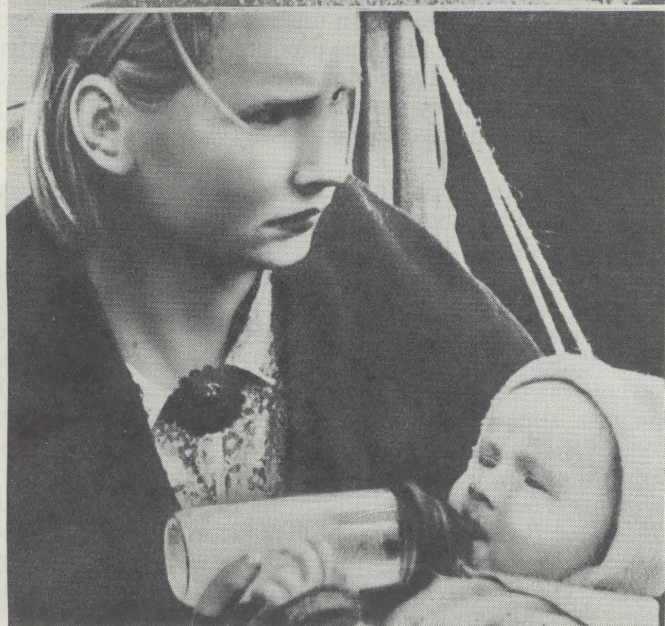
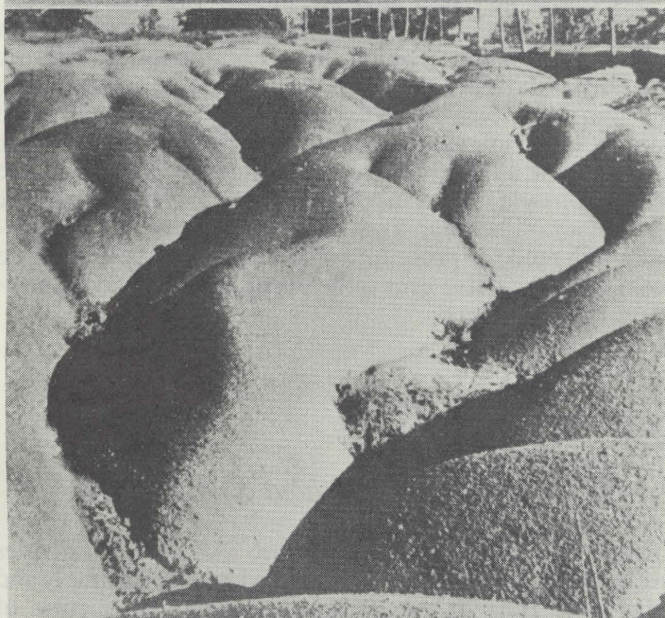
So deep and so sincere a cry from the heart is almost unique in the annals of film-production. Every accent, every shot, seems to breathe horror, despair and terrible warning. That is not to say that cold analysis after the fact will find no flaws, nor that as a film this is perfect in every detail: for example, the use of superimpositions to convey the ghostliness of the resurrected dead is a weak and mechanical device, the time taken to work up to the final climax is something too long, and the introduction of a stock love-tangle at the beginning is quite superfluous. However, the last-mentioned, which is probably the severest defect, happily discolours only a small portion of the canvas; and as for the other points, the emotional power of the film as a whole is so tremendous that they are driven into the background of one's awareness.

Gance's plan, of starting out with the aimless brutalities of the last war and ending with the blood-chilling approach of the next, sets off forcefully and imaginatively the known evil against the unknown greater. Either without the other would mean less; and certainly, the scenes of the Great War alone would have been insufficiently emphatic. Portrayals of the Great War, however stern or pacific their intention, inevitably culminate in heroics, partly because the events dealt with have already donned the romantic cloak of history, partly because the old narrow patriotic allegiances are too easily re-awakened.

Nothing but war itself, it is true, can ever make fully clear to our minds the frantic and pitiless nightmare into which its victims are cast. But Gance, by the development of a gradually darkening spiritual atmosphere, by calling the elements themselves symbolically into play, and by courageously inserting into the resurrection-sequences shots of actual war-wounded—*mutilés de la Guerre* (and how mutilated!)—carries us a long way towards realisation. There are some things—the scenes of panic fear in Paris on the outbreak of the new war, of defenceless non-combatants waiting without hope for the inferno, of the ghastly columns of the arisen dead marching grimly, passionlessly, on their road—which it is difficult to forget. And the performance of Victor Francen in the central rôle must surely be the most moving of his career.

Any temptation to rationalise the film's mysticism has wisely been avoided; and indeed, the climax makes no pretence at a logical solution. What happens to the war is obscure—perhaps it does not really matter. When the multitude of the slaughtered, having delivered their dreadful manifesto, sink down again at last into the earth, we receive a sense not of fulfilment, not of repose after strain, but of sheer exhaustion. This is in keeping with the film's bitter message, which says in effect: "Beware, or the very dead themselves may come to judge you—to judge, not to save!"





## "THE RIVER"

*There has been, to put it mildly, a certain amount of controversy over this latest American Documentary. ARTHUR VESSELO, in the review printed below, thinks it is good, very good, and "vindicates a mode of procedure whose problems had begun to seem too formidable ever to be overcome"*

TO DISCUSS the merits or demerits of an impressionist technique is to discuss what is possibly the fundamental problem of film-making (and not only in the documentary field, though there it becomes more obvious); a problem, accordingly, to which there is no simple solution. Equally convincing reasons may be found for asserting either that impressionism gives insight into reality or that it obscures reality; that it is profound or profoundly artificial; that it is the goal of imagination or the last refuge of incompetence. The truth that emerges out of these contradictions is that the impressionist approach is beset with enough obstacles to bring the unskilful quickly to the ground; but not, for all that, that it is necessarily wrong in itself.

In fact, the film is, willy-nilly, a largely impressionist medium, and when we talk of impressionism as such, we merely mean a technique which lays deliberate emphasis on that aspect. If the film used only formal thought-symbols, like those of literature, it could reduce impressionism to a minimum. On the other hand, if it used only formal sense-images, like those of music, it could exalt impressionism to a state of almost pure abstraction. But since it uses concrete sight- and sound-images, combining the attributes both of referential meaning and of emotional affectiveness in equivalent measure, it must, living despite itself in two worlds, make the best of both.

*The River* is impressionist in the sense of being quite deliberate about the matter. It has an *a priori* excuse, for its aims are twofold. In the first place, it attempts to show how generations of American settlers have mishandled the natural gifts of the Mississippi regions, tearing down forests and uprooting soils, mindless of future disaster in the craving for present gain; and, as a climax to this, it propagates the virtues of the Roosevelt administration, which, setting out in the Tennessee valley, has undertaken the memorable task of damming the waters and turning them to productive ends, of rehabilitating the land, and of rehousing the poverty-stricken population. But in the second place, the film remembers the dramatic significance of "the river" itself, the vast Mississippi river which runs thousands of miles from east to west of the North American continent, through "the greatest river-valley in the world"; the river which inspired one of America's best writers to his best novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, and beside whose majesty and power even the New Deal sinks perhaps a little into the shade. In this latter domain impressionism finds a *raison*



*d'être*, though the method is still a dangerous one. Others indeed in similar circumstances have succumbed and wrought confusion and failure; but it is the triumph of Pare Lorentz and his helpers to have proved that it was the individual effort, not the principle, which in those cases fell short.

The only ultimate test of success is whether or not a thing "comes off." There are always, however, certain external criteria which may fittingly be applied, and with the impressionist documentary film the main criteria are three: simplicity, consistency and the establishment of a harmonious relationship between the picture and the sound-track. If Lorentz has not fulfilled perfectly the demands of all three, he has at any rate come very much nearer doing so than anyone before him.

His sound-track takes up one chief line, that of a poetically-conceived commentary, and follows it throughout, never breaking the mood. There must have been some temptation to add other elements in order to guard against a feared monotony—to add, for instance, other voices and snatches of throaty choral singing, and to vary the mood of the commentary between the loftily-lyrical and the flatly-didactic—but such temptation has been, by the grace of God, resisted. The sole accompaniment, beyond carefully-selected natural sounds, is a straightforward musical score which achieves atmosphere without obtrusiveness by the interweaving into its texture of local folk-tunes; and the commentary itself maintains an even, restrained tone, which lends itself as well to the delivery of essential information as to the recital of rhythmic phrases and lists of names (according to a common poetic tradition) included for their musical value.

It would have been easy to make the mistake of thinking

that the whole of the work could be done by the sound-track, and that all that was needed for the pictorial side was a series of statically-suggestive scraps. That mistake has not been made. The photography, whatever its various sources, is from start to finish magnificent, and has been edited into an excellent continuity, endowed with a great spirit of vitality and movement. Moreover, it has a community of feeling with the sound-track, and the two run together.

There are flaws: it would be foolish to expect otherwise. In just one or two places the camera descends to the rather superficial lyricism of silhouettes against the sky; and the commentary, in trying, it may be, to keep clear of the self-sufficiency and tense compactness of verse intended to be read on its own, reaches at times to the other extreme, of over-repetitiveness. More serious than these occasional deficiencies is the inability to integrate with absolute completeness the explanatory and the atmospheric; for it must be admitted that the story of the river is sometimes flooded out by its own detail coupled with the opposed strength of the impressionist technique.

Yet this is no more, after all, than to say that the critic may plume himself on having foreseen certain of the less disposable difficulties which the method involves. Further than that, if he is just, he will not go. Even while impeaching the film for a lack of clarity in exposition, he must still admire the compelling manner in which it recreates, in all its might and grandeur, the immaterial essence of the Mississippi—in some passages with an almost electric immediacy. Thereby, *The River* vindicates the employment of a mode of procedure whose problems had begun to seem too formidable ever to be overcome; and the achievement is monumental.

## TWO TOPICAL FILMS

WILLIAM FARR reviews "*Spanish A.B.C.*" and "*War Without End*"

*Spanish A.B.C.* is an account of the educational policy of the Spanish Government and of the extent to which it is being carried out in spite of the civil war. Both are compared with the policy of the insurgents—typified by the closing of universities and secondary schools in the areas under their control and by a statement made by an insurgent leader that all the misfortunes of Spain come from the folly of teaching men and women to read and write—and with the amount of money spent and number of schools built in the last years of the monarchy and of the reactionary Republican government. At the end of the monarchy 52 per cent of the Spanish people could neither read nor write; the task of the Spanish Government is not merely to educate the rising generation but by educating adults to enable Spain to catch up 200 years on this country, for example. Throughout Government Spain thousands of new schools have been built since the war started, workers of all kinds are being taught by voluntary teachers in special institutes or in their factories and workshops, and even soldiers come out of the trenches to attend classes or borrow books from the 800 libraries formed for them. Scientific research is being maintained—a Jesuit priest and his Jesuit staff continued their work until air-raids drove them from their observatory—and pictures and other treasures from the museums and galleries are being carefully packed and

stored in "bomb-proof" shelters. All these activities are amply documented by the film and presented simply and efficiently. It is an extraordinary and moving picture of conviction and determination unshaken by the horrors and dangers of war. The film was produced for the Progressive Film Institute by Ivor Montagu, directed by Thorold Dickinson and Sidney Cole and photographed—amazingly well in view of the circumstances—by Arthur Graham and Alan Lawson.

*Behind the Lines*, produced by the same group, presents, in the first half, a short survey of the way in which, and the people by whom, Government Spain is being governed today, and, in the second half, documentary evidence of the bombing of British ships in Spanish ports and interviews with a German and an Italian pilot who were captured when their planes were brought down. The objects of the film are to show the democratic character of the government which includes among its members, and in leading positions, conservatives and liberals; and in the second half to demonstrate the official character of German and Italian intervention. The film is obviously more propagandist than *Spanish A.B.C.* and it is less well made. Mention should be made of the effective way in which Spanish songs sung by refugee children in England are used to accompany the films. Both films run for about twenty minutes.



## THE SCHOOL FILM IN GERMANY

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*"A visit to the Berlin Reichsstelle is a real film experience," states F. WILKINSON in this article describing conditions in Germany*

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IN A PREVIOUS article (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter, 1937-38), I tried to survey, in relation to this country, the state of the film in education in France, Germany and U.S.S.R. My contention was that the mere comparison of numbers of projectors issued to schools is insufficient evidence on which to base conclusions. Other factors need to be considered and I directed my inquiries accordingly. For instance, I tried to assess the number of films available in each country which had been made purely for classroom use together with their quality and subject-matter and, after that, the degree of opportunity given to teachers for using films. Visits to schools enabled me to apprehend the quality of film-lesson technique and the extent to which teachers freely believed in the film as a medium of instruction. I took pains also to discover whether and to what extent educational films were being utilised for propaganda purposes. After due consideration of all the relevant factors, I gave it as my opinion that English children are receiving pretty well as much worth-while information from the film in their schools as their fellows are receiving in other countries.

Such a conclusion, however, was not intended to indicate that we in this country should feel satisfied with the state of the film in education here. In fact, for my part, I returned to England very much envying the educationists I had met in the three countries visited, and especially those of Germany. Amongst the German educationists I found none more inspired or competent than our own, but, although I pitied their bondage to a code, I felt, and I still continue to feel, that I would gladly barter some of my personal freedom for some of their subsidised efficiency. As an example of what I mean, let me compare the facilities given to our own British Film Institute with those enjoyed by the German Reichsstelle für den Unterrichtsfilm.

### THE GERMAN REICHSTELLE

In our own case all those who have been connected with education by film from the outset know only too well the long and laborious struggle which took place before the B.F.I. came into existence, how throughout its existence it has had to carry on its business in the face of much hostility and jealousy and that it has never been able to command sufficient funds for its work. To make such a statement is not to accuse anybody but the whole community, for we English people take it as a matter for pride that public work shall be conducted as if we were at civil war. The German Reichsstelle, on the other hand, was created as a fully going concern and became at once an expression of national unity on a matter which was given no less than national importance. Such being its valuation, it was endowed adequately at once, its funds being obtained from a contribution of 20 pf. a quarter from every boy and girl while still at school and of 1 RM. a term from every

university student. Thus also the authority governing the educational film was vested in those for whose benefit it was to be made and used.

Since the money was there from the beginning it was not difficult to persuade the manufacturers to produce a satisfactory projector for use in schools, and with a minimum of delay every school was able to avail itself of the necessary apparatus. The next step was the provision of the films and, denying themselves the luxury of the interminable argument which has taken place in this country, the Germans laid down two basic principles right from the start—that all films shown in schools must be made solely for school purposes, and must therefore be based on the curriculum, and that the question as to what films were required should be left to the teachers. On these foundations a simple, effective and thoroughly satisfactory system of production has been built up. Any teacher can suggest a subject and each year a national conference of teachers' representatives meets for eight days in Berlin to decide the film programme for the ensuing twelve months. So far seventy films embracing all subjects have been made annually. This conference also chooses the teachers or others who are to write the films. Then when the script has been passed by the Reichsstelle a film company is commissioned to photograph it, but the author and technical experts from the Reichsstelle continue to co-operate with the technicians of the company throughout the whole process of manufacture. After it has been finally passed as satisfactory by the Reichsstelle, the requisite number of copies are ordered and despatched to the local distributing centres. For distribution purposes the country has been divided into twenty-five areas each with its chief centre and as many sub-centres as are necessary to bring every school within not further than 15 km. reach. Altogether there are nearly 900 of these centres scattered throughout the Reich.

### FREE COPIES

Copies of films are distributed free on a basis of ten to each chief centre and three to each sub-centre. These numbers are for films in general demand. More specialised films, such as those dealing with mathematics, have naturally a smaller distribution. But the aim of the Reichsstelle is to provide each school with a copy of every film that is made for its particular grade. Since, however, there are already over 200 films and Germany has about 70,000 schools, this aim will not be achieved for some time.



When one compares this sensible organisation and the immense achievement it implies, one cannot but sympathise with our own Film Institute, whose energies have so often been engaged in combating chaos so that there has been insufficient opportunity to launch out boldly on a really constructive scheme.

The German Reichsstelle is also adequately housed (albeit temporarily) and staffed. There are twelve departments, and with the exception of those which deal with purely business matters, all the heads of departments and their assistants must be qualified teachers and have had actual teaching experience, especially in the use of the film. At any time these officials are at liberty to return to teaching, and when they do so they suffer no loss either of status or service. A visit to the Berlin Reichsstelle is a real film experience. To begin with the building is chock-a-block with films and apparatus. Copies of every educational film in the Reich are always available and can be projected in one of several theatres on the premises. The place buzzes with educational jargon. A teacher at once feels at home and amongst his own kin. He cannot help believing that films are an integral part of his craft.

In England we have only a system of seconding for special duty in the fighting services, where it has worked so well that it is surprising that it has not been adopted in education. Now that there is a surplus of teachers perhaps

the authorities will change their policy. At any rate the L.C.C. has recently seconded a teacher for duty as an assistant curator of a museum.

My experience in Germany confirmed me in a conviction which I have long held and often ventilated. Because films must naturally supplement the text-book, it does not follow that they should be produced for the market in the same way as a text-book, if only for the one reason that there are never going to be many films on any one subject. Therefore to my mind educational films cannot ever be produced satisfactorily by leaving the bulk of the initiative to the film-making companies. Educational film making and distribution must inevitably become a co-operative enterprise, the parties involved being the Board of Education and the local authorities, the teachers and the film companies specialising in instructional work. The British Film Institute is the only body with sufficient prestige to bring about an amalgamation of these interests. It has set up many panels which have issued reports on what sort of films are needed in each subject. The next step, surely, should be to suggest to the Educational Panel that it organise a conference to decide how all these suggested films are to be made and, being made, distributed. If such a panel ever gets to work, the German system of manufacture and distribution will be found well worth attention and in some of its features well worth adoption.

## THE ADMINISTRATOR AND THE SCHOOL FILM

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*A few of the administrative problems raised by the use of the film in education are dealt with below by H. S. MAGNAY, Director of Education, Barnsley. The article is a summary of an address given by Mr. Magnay at the conference of Local Education Authorities of the North East of England held by the British Film Institute on May 25th*

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IT IS necessary for the administrator to maintain the proper proportion in the teaching media used in the schools and in the allocation of expenditure in respect of the various media. Of all the mechanical aids to teaching, with the possible exception of the wireless receiver, the film projector is most closely associated with the every day experience of school children, the majority of whom regularly attend the cinema.

The experiments carried out by Middlesex, London, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, etc., have proved beyond doubt that the film is a very valuable teaching medium and should be used in a variety of subjects in the school curriculum.

The administrator is particularly concerned with the following factors:

### TYPES OF PROJECTORS

First, the use to which the projector is to be put. There are two main ways in which the film may be used for teaching purposes—in the classroom for showing short “direct” teaching films and in the school hall for demonstration to larger numbers of children.

In the former case a cheap projector—costing, say, between £20 and £30—is all that is required. The films used should normally not last more than ten minutes, and should be followed by discussion and note taking. Finally

the film should be run through again at the end of the lesson for emphasis. In some cases it may be desirable to follow this up by having a further showing three weeks or a month later.

Films used in the school hall on the other hand should be of the lecture type, suitable as a background for teaching, for vocational guidance, etc. To show them, a high-powered and, therefore, more expensive projector is required. One of these, however, should normally suffice to serve four schools, being used by each of them in turn. A complete list of projectors available, their costs and the addresses of the firms supplying them can be found in the British Film Institute's Leaflet No. 5.

### ACCOMMODATION AND EQUIPMENT

Second, the administrator must consider the question of accommodation and equipment. Under this section may be grouped:

- (i) The darkening of the room;
- (ii) The type of screen to be used;
- (iii) The type of projector.

Taking these in order, it may be said at once that there is no necessity to darken a classroom completely in order to show films. Apart from the need for some ventilation, it is useful to have as much light as possible in the room for purposes of note taking and also to maintain discipline!



The only darkening really necessary is the end of the room nearest the screen, say by fitting dark blinds to two windows. Although thick curtains would do for this, blinds fixed in running slots are the best as they enable the room to be darkened and lightened with the minimum of fuss and disturbance.

#### THE SCREEN

Coming to the second point, the screen, there is a large variety of these available ranging from simple, home made, transparent ones for back projection to more expensive folding screens made by the trade, which cost between £3 and £10. A screen can quite easily be made out of three-ply wood painted with "Extralite"; this costs 4s. 6d. a tin and two tins would be necessary for a screen measuring 8 ft. by 6 ft.

Most important of all, what type of projector should be used? Sound projectors are expensive; but on the other hand it is impossible to get a background of natural sound or expert commentary without. There is still, however, much value in silent teaching films and therefore, if it is necessary to make a choice, a number of silent machines are preferable to one sound machine. The projectors should be able to show 9.5 and 16mm. sizes of film and should also be able to show a still picture and to reverse.

#### FILM SUPPLY

Third, the administrator ought to see that teachers are trained in the use of the projectors. Courses in projection, for example, are held each year at Loughborough, Bristol and other places.

The formation of Teachers' Film Associations is also desirable in order to advise on the films required and order them through the Education Office. They would also be able to pre-view films, decide on their usefulness, and to correlate the curriculum in the schools so that appropriate films may be shown in more than one school when hired. Such an Association would be able to act as a production unit to make films with a local interest to meet specific local needs.

Finally we come to the question of film supply. While many films can be hired for the cost of postage only, the average charge is about 3s. 6d. per day per reel. A list of the libraries supplying education films is contained in Leaflet No. 5 and other leaflets of the British Film Institute.

In this connection, I believe that the next step should be the formation of regional film libraries supported by the local education authorities. Such libraries, by acquiring films, would increase the supply and make them more readily available, while in addition teachers would more easily be enabled to pre-view films they were intending to use. Furthermore, the Committee controlling such a library could make contact with the trade with regard to local needs while block booking in advance might be possible. Such libraries would also prevent overlapping in the making of educational films by local authorities.

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"Leaflet No. 5" referred to above by Mr. Magnay is CHOOSING A SCHOOL PROJECTOR. 7½d. post free.

There is also a companion booklet, USING A SCHOOL PROJECTOR. 1s. 2d. post free.

Both may be obtained from the British Film Institute.

## TWO SCHOOL FILM BOOKS REVIEWED

**Film and School.** Helen Rand and Richard Lewis. *Appleton-Century*. 4s. 6d.

It is frankly a little difficult to know what to make of the conglomeration of leading questions, misleading quotations and semi-digested facts, of which this "handbook in moving-picture evaluation" is made up. Had the book been sponsored by the film-industry one would have understood its lack of discrimination: had it been a straightforwardly journalistic effort aimed at a popular audience, one might have shrugged one's shoulders. But since it is an official publication of the American National Council of Teachers of English, intended deliberately for use in school-curriculum, one can only gape. Perhaps the most incredible page in the book is that devoted to a series of diagrams listing seventy-six different kinds of wipe.

No attempt is made to differentiate children according to age, type or sex: possibly the writers have some sort of standard or composite child in mind. Of the overwhelming multitude of subjects offered for discussion, several are in any case quite unsuitable for children of any age, type or sex. The callow and limited emotional experience of the adolescent does not, for example, promise well for discussions on "Friendship and Love" as related specifically to the simplified values of the film. One ends, in general, with the impression of a chaos of nebulous, imperfectly-analysed ideas; of continual divagations into the most irrelevant issues; and in short, of an already sufficiently complex topic tangled-up and obscured by an entirely fallacious approach.

A. VESSELO

**Actuality in School, An Experiment in Social Education.** G. J. Cons and Catherine Fletcher. *Methuen*. 2s. 6d.

It will be remembered that in the winter issue of SIGHT AND SOUND an account was given of an experiment in "actuality" in education. The authors of that article have now expanded it into this little book which should be read with interest by all those concerned with the future of the education of British children.

Farewell, rewards and fairies! will be the cry of many people when they read the statement on page 3, that "it is surely damaging we should encourage children to use reading as a method of escape rather than as an interpretation of reality. . . . So long as the stories are provided with adventure and action, it is easy to dope children with magic. Children should be finding drama and adventure from everyday life rather than from fantastic stories written by adults."

*Treasure Island* and *Crusoe*, Carroll and Kipling, Anderson, Grimm and Shakespeare, farewell! In future the dreams of childhood will be peopled by romantic dustmen and sewermen, milkmen and postmen, while no-one will care that poetry with Puck has died.

Apart from this, however, it is obvious that the system advocated works perfectly. Undoubtedly the children will be interested; undoubtedly they will learn a lot from the romantic actuality around them. Future years only will tell into what sort of adults they will become, since both "actuality" and education without a spicing of magic seem flavourless dishes.

R. W. D.



## THE DELUGE

*An interesting colour film experiment described by C. F. TRANGMAR, Principal of the Ealing Technical College*

THE EALING Technical College and School of Art first experimented with film production in 1934 and has now a fair number of films to its credit. The film libraries have been found able to meet the requirements of school subjects such as history, geography and commodities and the School of Retail Distribution, which forms part of the College, in particular has made great use of such films for instructional purposes. A supply for the use of the Art School was, however, not so easy to find. Accordingly a number of films dealing with such matters as anatomy, animal and nature study have been produced in a manner appropriate to the needs of art students. General interest films have also been made showing the work of the School of Art and of the Technical College. In addition to these activities in film making there exists in the College a film club, meeting once a week, which has shown a wide variety of carefully selected professional films. This club has met with an enthusiastic response as is evidenced by the essays on criticism which follow the weekly shows.

Having all the necessary equipment for film making, it was not unnatural that the School of Art should essay some production on a somewhat less restricted basis than the purely instructional film. Considerable technical experience had been gained and the facilities of the photographic department had made it possible for all the processing of black and white films to be done in the College. The negative and positive system had been mainly used although a certain amount of reversal had been done as well.

The colour film discussed in this article was the first attempt to work in colour, and *The Deluge* was the result of considerable time and thought. It was made in the summer of 1935 and any merit it may possess is better appreciated if it is remembered that the experience gained during the last three years was not then available. It was indeed among the earliest productions in colour by schools and should be judged accordingly.

In the first instance, much thought was given to the choice of a subject suitable for amateur colour production. The Dufaycolor process was to be used and this exercised an important influence on the choice of a theme. As readers will be well aware, the Dufaycolor process, on account of the nature of the screen employed, produces what is really not an even surface of colour but a multitude of tiny spots, giving a grained or granulated appearance. Much of the effectiveness of the film was due to a successful attempt to use this granulated ground to convey an impression appropriate to the nature and period of the subject. *The Deluge* was a medieval mystery play played by the Chester Players about the fourteenth century. *The Deluge*, as a film, reproduces the scenes of a mystery play as though embroidered on tapestry yet endowed with life and movement. The tapestry is suggested by the granulated effect which emerges when the picture is processed, and the quietness of the action sustains the illusion.

In *The Deluge* this aim is achieved to a marked degree. The

acting of mystery or miracle plays passed out of the hands of the priests and was taken over by the town guilds. The medieval actors played, not in the clothing supposedly appropriate to the characters they portrayed, but in the colourful costumes of their own period. *The Deluge* shows Noah and his family receiving warning of the approaching catastrophe, the attempts of the sons to persuade their mother to leave her gossiping companions and their eventual resort to more forcible methods to compel her to enter the Ark. The clothes of the men and the dresses of the women offer reds, blues, purples, yellows and greens in profusion. The action, as drama, is negligible; but as movement it is, together with the abundance and variety of colour, an essential factor in the general effect of the picture.

The scenes showing the rising waters and the floating Ark against a background of mountainous landscape are pleasing in colour, but the effect of the medieval costumes is, perhaps, more striking. The colours are clean and clear, and subtle and delicate in their tones. The photography was done in artificial light and this may have given an added softness and delicacy to the production.

The film represents a co-operative effort on the part of the School of Art, several departments of its work contributing. The dresses were designed and made by the students of costume and dress design. The modelling department contributed the animals for the pairs that entered the Ark. The landscape and the models of the Ark in various stages of completion were the work of the model-making department.

Naturally, the processing of this film was done by the Dufaycolor people who co-operated in a most helpful fashion throughout. As the films are expensive and cost an important factor, the picture had to be right first time. In the photography the greatest problem was that of correct and adequate lighting. As is well known, lighting must be carefully and accurately arranged for colour films. The impossibility of repeating unsatisfactory shots again created rather a dilemma. To overcome these difficulties the manufacturers supplied short lengths for experiment and very kindly processed and reported on them so that errors could be corrected. Without this help the picture could hardly have been produced. Guided by the reports we had a clear idea of the lighting required before we started on the picture, and in providing it we derived great benefit from the experience and equipment of our photographic department.

For the flood itself, a large tank was used. The landscape model with all its peaks and rivers was inserted and then slowly covered with water. For the subsequent dispersal of the waters, no special arrangements were necessary; for at the appropriate moment the tank obligingly sprang a leak, and the cameraman had to hang on to his camera while the escaping waters rose above his knees.

The complete film is of about 400 ft. and is a good example of the co-operative efforts of many varied departments leading to a production which has been declared by many outside authorities to have considerable artistic merit.



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Dear Sir,

If your ideas of expense, in cinematography, are based on your experience with 16 mm. apparatus you may still be of the opinion that you can't really afford it. Are you a "cinic"?

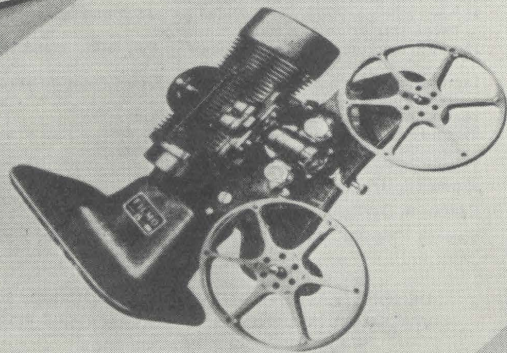
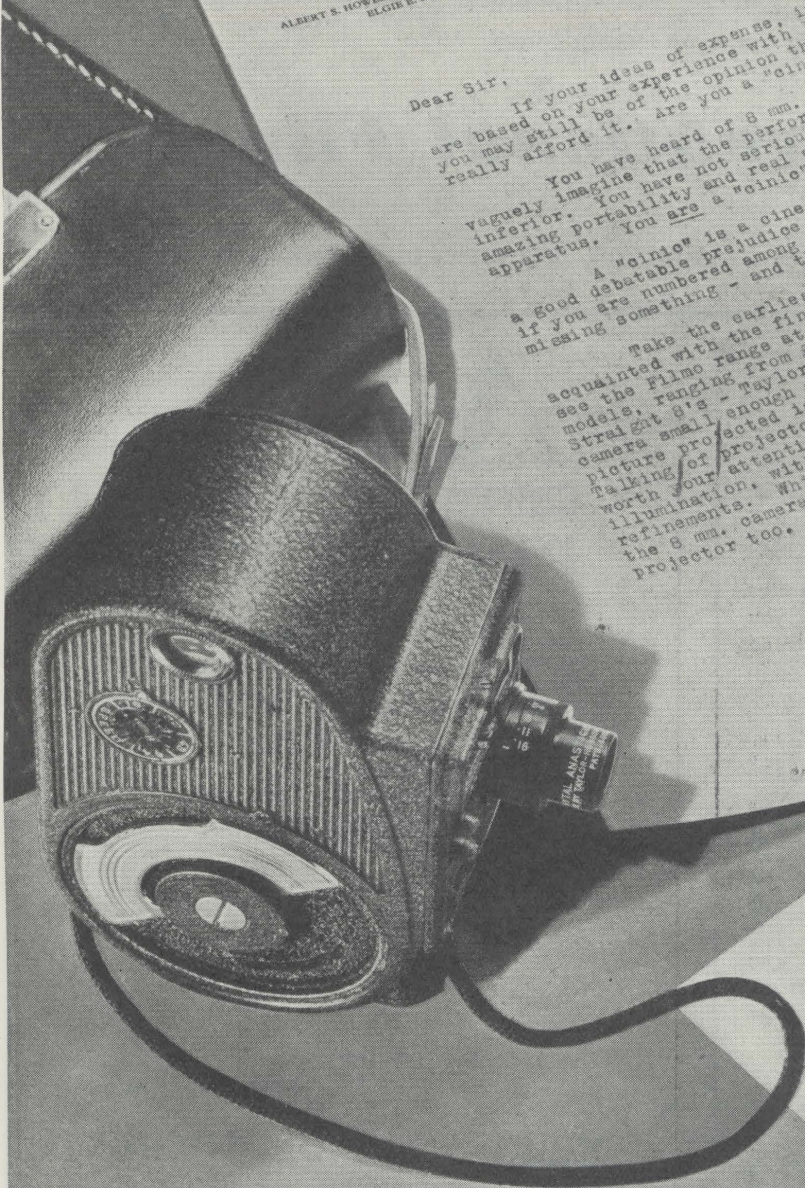
You have heard of 8 mm. apparatus, but vaguely imagine that the performance is in some way inferior. You have not seriously considered the amazing portability and real economies of 8 mm. apparatus. You are a "cinic"!

A "cinic" is a cine man with a prejudice - a good debatable prejudice did nobody any harm - but if you are numbered among the 8 mm. "cinics" you are missing something - and that is serious.

Take the earliest opportunity to become acquainted with the finest of all 8 mm. apparatus - see the Filmo range at your dealer. There are many models, ranging from £17. 7. 6d. Double 8's - straight 8's - Taylor Hobson lenses - 4 speeds. A camera small enough to slide into your pocket yet the picture projected is crystal clear up to 8 ft. wide. Talking of projectors, the Filmo 8 projector is well worth your attention. Filmo lens and 400 watt illumination. With numerous other Bell & Howell refinements. While you are at the dealers examining the 8 mm. cameras ask him to demonstrate the Filmo 8 projector too.

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# DAYLIGHT PROJECTION

*Daylight Projection in the classroom is one of the biggest problems facing all those who use the film in school. "What sort of screen is most useful? Where should I place the Projector? How can I keep the screen reasonably shaded?" These and similar questions are constantly being asked by schoolmasters. Here is a page of diagrams which may be helpful*

MR. W. A. SMALLCOMBE, the Curator of the Reading Museum and Art Gallery, has kindly supplied the photograph and constructional sketches which we give below of a cine screen for daylight projection which can be easily constructed for a total cost of under £2.

It is dismantled for storage and carriage and may be erected in five minutes.

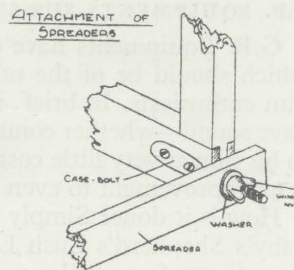
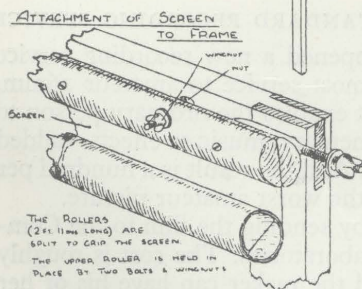
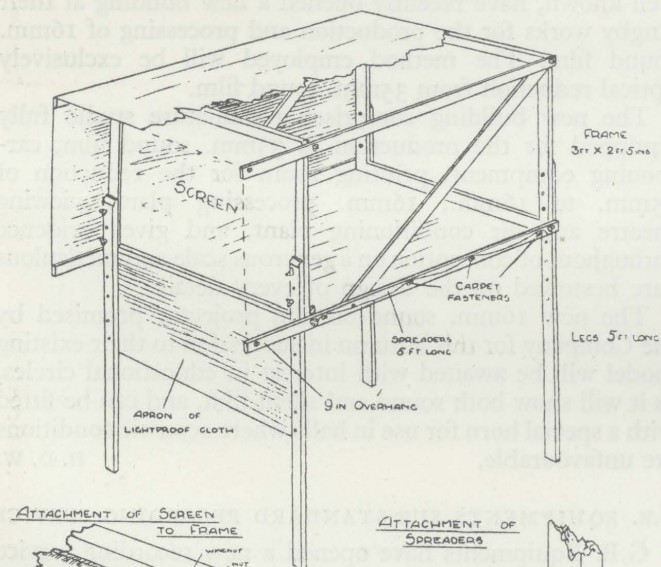
The screen is of good quality white tracing paper (not linen) fixed to two wooden rollers, one of which is attached to the top of the frame. The main frame work is covered with a lightproof material—X-ray cloth is ideal.

With a short focus lens (1.5 in.) the projector stands 9 ft. behind the screen, but by employing a mirror, as indicated below, less space is required.

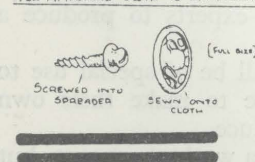
Provided no extraneous light falls directly on the screen, a high degree of illumination is obtainable, and this back projection is also excellent for lantern slides and shadowgraph work—silhouettes.

As part of the test made at Reading forty showings with a Gebescope model B were given in one week in an open art Gallery during daylight and electric light; the audiences varying from twelve to fifty pupils and adults. The results were highly satisfactory.

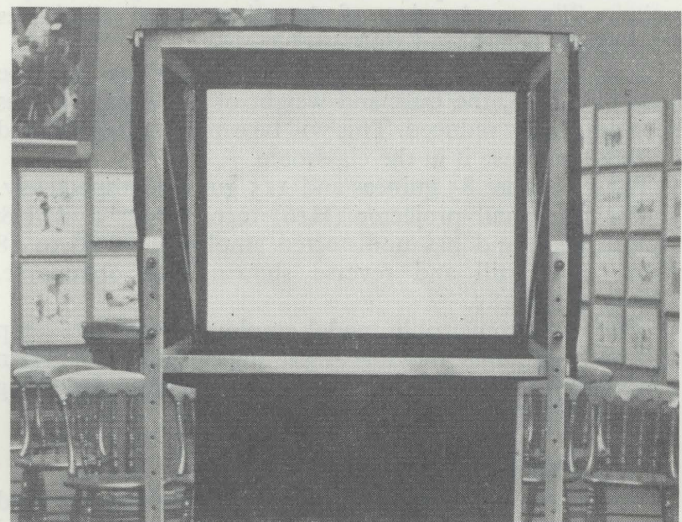
CINE SCREEN FOR DAYLIGHT PROJECTION



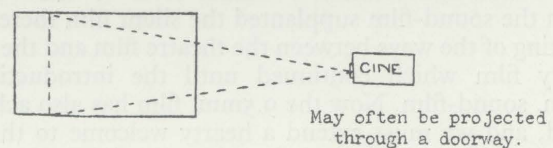
CARPET FASTENERS FOR ATTACHING CLOTH TO FRAMEWORK



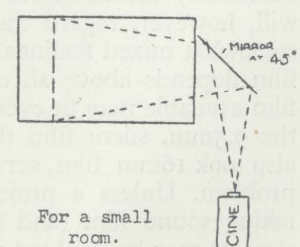
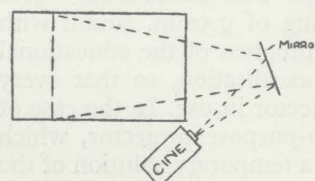
MATERIALS REQUIRED			
TIMBER			
FRAMES	22 FEET	2' x 1"	
LEGS	20 FEET	2' x 1"	
SPREADERS	30 FEET	2' x 1/2"	
CLOTH	X-RAY CLOTH	4 YDS	60" WIDE
SCREEN	TRACING PAPER	1 YD	30" WIDE
BOLTS	12 WING-NUTS AND HEADED BOLTS		
	8 WING-NUTS AND CASE BOLTS		
	WASHERS FASTENERS, SCREWS, ETC		



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## TECHNICAL NOTES

*New Apparatus—G.B. Equipments new models—Pathé introduces 9.5mm. sound-on-film—improvements to the Filmosound—B.T.H.'s Rugby works—Sub-standard recording service*

MESSRS. G.B. EQUIPMENTS are putting on the market three new models of their 16mm. sound-on-film projectors and one 16mm. silent projector convertible to sound which embody some extremely interesting innovations.

In the first place all are built for operation on both direct current and alternating current. This is a great boon for any projectionist who may have to operate in a district served by direct current mains. The sound projectors, K16, L16 and H16, have grades of power corresponding more or less to classroom, small hall and large hall use. The K16 and L16 employ a specially-designed claw-mechanism equipped with self-lubricating bearings and a safety trip which guards the film against damage in the event of the lower loop shortening. A still device is available and the change from sound speed to a slightly accelerated silent speed is accomplished by a simple switch. The acceleration of the silent speed eliminates the tedious business of shutter-changing.

In spite of the fact that 1,600 ft. spools can now be accommodated, the bulk and weight of the apparatus has been amazingly reduced. This will be especially appreciated by those who use it in the classroom.

The prices are 85 guineas and 115 guineas respectively.

The large hall projector (H16) incorporates a Bell & Howell head and has undistorted amplification up to 28 watts. Both still and reverse showing are obtainable. The price is £185.

The silent convertible model employs a 500-watt lamp and thus achieves the high-light output which is often necessary for classroom work where incomplete darkening has to be faced.

### 9.5MM. SOUND-ON-FILM

One of the most valuable functions of the sub-standard libraries has been the manner in which they supplemented the Repertory Theatres by rendering available for revival films which had reached a certain level of achievement. When the sound-film supplanted the silent film there came a parting of the ways between the theatre film and the home library film which continued until the introduction of 16mm. sound-film. Now the 9.5mm. film has also achieved sound, and we must extend a hearty welcome to this less costly method of reviving for home use films which have done their rounds in the theatres and putting into circulation specialised films which would otherwise find no sufficiently remunerative market. The educational world will, however, regard the coming of 9.5mm. sound with somewhat mixed feelings. The progress of the educational film depends above all on standardisation, so that every film available may fit every projector in use. In the case of the 9.5mm. silent film the two-purpose projector, which also took 16mm. film, served as a temporary solution of the problem. Unless a projector can be devised capable of taking sound film (and silent film) of both substandard sizes, it may be doubted whether the new standard sound-

film can hope for a very warm welcome from educationists.

### IMPROVED BELL-HOWELL FILMOSOUND MODEL 138

A more powerful amplifier capable of delivering an output of approximately ten watts is now being installed in the model 138 *Filmosounds*.

In addition to the larger amplifier, these projectors are being equipped with a new type adjustable take-up, to provide constant tension when large or small reels are used, and with the Flexomatic type sprocket guards for the first and second sprockets, to seat automatically the film perforations on the sprocket teeth when the projector is incorrectly threaded.

### THE BRITISH THOMSON-HOUSTON COMPANY'S NEW 16MM. LABORATORY

The British Thomson-Houston Company, whose pioneer work both on standard and sub-standard sound film is well known, have recently opened a new building at their Rugby works for the production and processing of 16mm. sound film. The method employed will be exclusively optical reduction from 35mm. sound film.

The new building comprises a miniature studio fully equipped for the production of 35mm. sound film, cartooning equipment, printing room for the reduction of 35mm. to 16mm., 16mm. processing plant, viewing theatre and air conditioning plant, and gives evidence throughout of conception on a generous scale and meticulous care bestowed on the design of every detail.

The new 16mm. sound-on-film projector promised by the Company for this autumn in succession to their existing model will be awaited with interest in educational circles, as it will show both sound and silent film, and can be fitted with a special horn for use in halls where acoustic conditions are unfavourable.

H. D. W.

### G.B. EQUIPMENTS SUB-STANDARD RECORDING SERVICE

G.B. Equipments have opened a new recording service which should be of the utmost service to amateur 16mm. film enthusiasts. In brief, it enables the ordinary person to have sound—whether commentary, music or effects—added to his film at very little cost. And the result is a hundred per cent improvement to even the worst amateur picture.

How is it done? Simply by sending the film to the Company's Shepherd's Bush Laboratories. The cost is roughly £4 per 100 feet of film and the maker can have his or her directions as to sound and dialogue followed, make his own commentary or leave it all to the experts to produce a finished film.

It is expected that the service will be of special use to schools, since masters will be able to make their own commentaries to the films they produce.

The studio can handle 100 films a week at present, but later this figure will be extended as required.



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